

LONDON READER

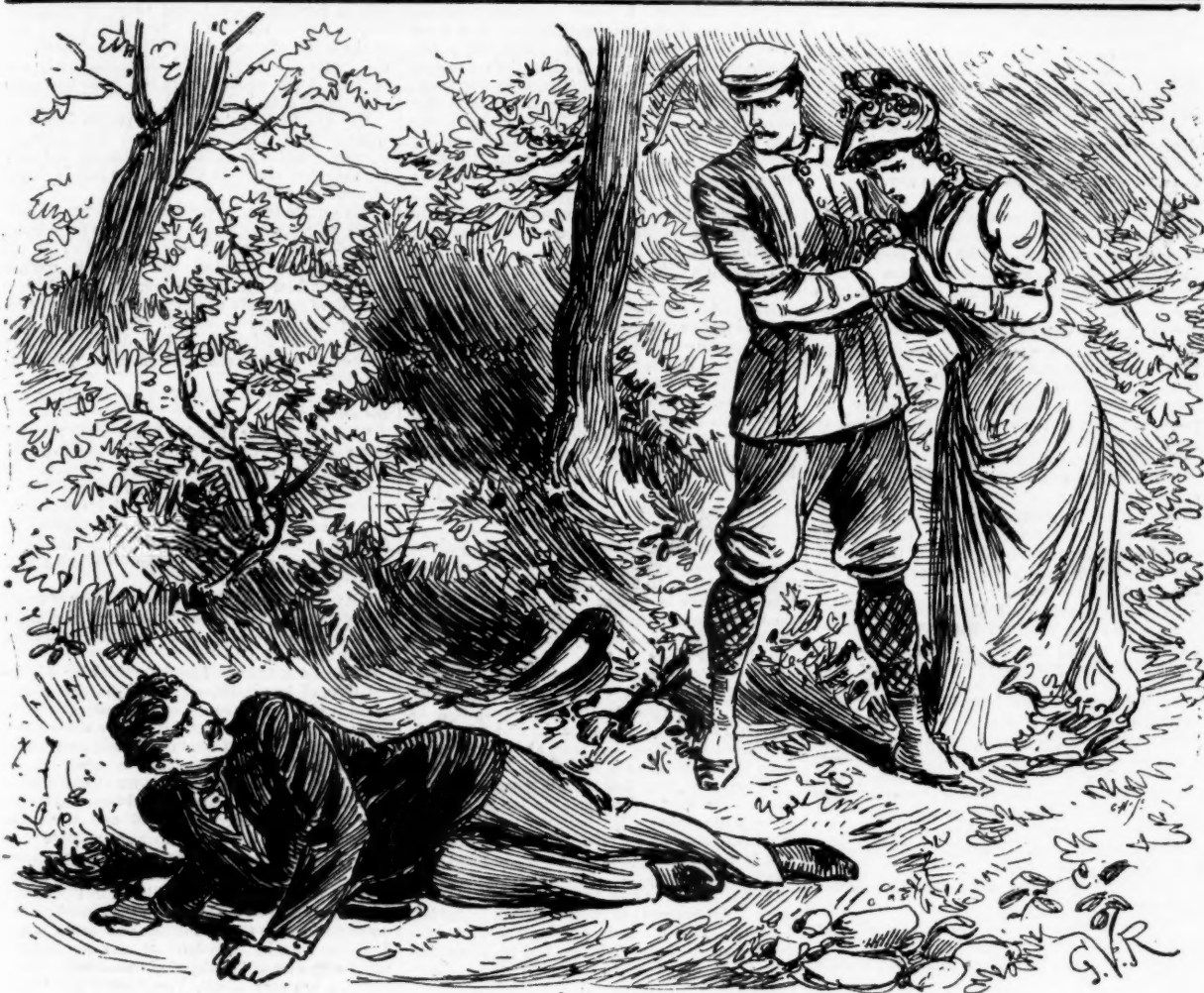
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



A STINGING BLOW FROM NOEL SENT BRYAN ROLLING HE HARDLY KNEW WHERE.

A CRUEL SCHEME.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

IN all Northshire there was no more picturesque dwelling than Whitehill Farm, which probably took its name from its position on the summit of a steep chalk hill. From the windows could be seen the pretty, sleepy village of Walden Royal, stretched like a panorama before the eyes, the grey old church in the midst of the red-tiled cottages adding to the effect, while farther still one could catch a glimpse of Walden Castle, the ancient home of the Walden family, whose descent was as old as the village, and who, rumour said, had more than once in days gone by declined a title.

The Nortons had rented Whitehill for three generations. It was the finest farm on the estate, and they were the oldest and most esteemed of the Squire's tenants. Whitehill Farm, like Walden Castle, had descended from

father to son in unbroken line; but now there came a change.

Andrew Norton, a fine specimen of an English yeoman, had been married twice, but yet had only daughters to call him father; his second wife had been a widow and she brought her two boys home with her to Whitehill village; gossip declared she intended one of them to succeed his stepfather, but then the present Mrs. Norton was by no means popular in Northshire, so the report might have been only scandal.

"She is a good wife," said Mrs. Brice, the vicar's wife, who tried hard to live at peace with all her husband's parishioners, "but somehow she can't leave her neighbours alone. I do believe, James, Mrs. Norton is never so happy as when she is interfering with other people."

The Vicar, a tall, scholarly-looking man, shrugged his shoulders; he was much attached to Andrew Norton, but he never set foot at Whitehill oftener than he could help; he was wont to observe the mistress of the farm always rubbed him the wrong way.

"Norton never did but one foolish thing, Katy, and that was marrying Mrs. Oldham. He lost caste by it, and certainly peace, while I can't for

the life of me see what he gained; after such a wife as Vera's mother how could he take another?"

Mrs. Brice sighed. The first Mrs. Norton had been a school-fellow of her own, and the daughter of the last Vicar of Walden. It was while visiting her friend Katy first met her husband, who was then Mr. Armstrong's curate. Both Mr. and Mrs. Brice had been most intimate with Rosamond Norton till the time of her death. They were the godparents of her only child, and to both it seemed inexplicable that after gentle, refined Rosamond, Andrew Norton could take such a helpmeet as Julia Oldham.

Vera was grown up now, and by common consent the prettiest girl in Walden. Her step mother was not unkind to her, but, though a well-meaning sort of woman, she did not understand her husband's daughter. Vera had been a child of twelve when she first came under her rule, and even then had been a puzzle to her; but the mistress of Whitehill did her duty by the girl according to her light; the two Oldham boys, and the three little girls, who were the link between the two families, adored her, and even Mr. and Mrs. Brice, who looked on rather

anxious for their favourite, never thought Mrs. Norton unkind to her.

It was November, in London the gloomiest of months, but in Northshire, though the trees were bare the sky was clear and cloudless. The crisp winter air only made the fireside pleasanter, and Vera Norton, who had walked over to spend the afternoon at the vicarage, looked the picture of health and beauty, with her glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, as she took off her hat and wraps and sat down to enjoy a good long talk with her godmother, who seemed far nearer and dearer to her than her father's wife.

"What ages it seems since I was here," she said, drawing her chair a little closer to the fire, "and yet you were only away a month. Aren't you glad to be home?"

"Delighted!" returned Mrs. Brice. "Holidays are nice, but home is better, and now, Vera, I want a full and particular account of all you have been doing since I have been away."

Vera sighed. "It's been as dull as ditch-water," she said frankly, "and very uncomfortable too. Father says the harvest was so bad he can't keep Albert at school any longer, and that he must go into some office after Christmas, and it seems to have upset us all."

"His mother won't like that."

"I never saw her so angry. Of course, the boys have no real claim on father, and I'm sure he has always done his best for them. Mamma wanted Albert to stay at school another two years, and then go to an agricultural college to learn farming."

"With a view to Whitehill?"

"I—I suppose so; but father says times are so bad no one ought to go in for farming without a large capital, and that it will take all he can save to provide for the little girls; perhaps I ought not to tell you all this, but it has made things so troubled that we seem to live in a perpetual east wind."

"I can imagine it; but, Vera, I am thankful you at least are provided for. Your mother's fortune is settled on you, so Mrs. Norton can never hint that you ought to earn your own living."

"She does more than hint it. I'm not sure that I should mind," said Vera thoughtfully, "things are not going smoothly at home, since I left school last year; people will ask me out, friends of my own mother's, you know, and father makes me go, but there's always a scene, and I'm sure I'd rather never go anywhere."

"How old are you, Vera, nineteen?"

"Nineteen last month; it was different when I was at school, but now . . ."

Mrs. Brice put one hand tenderly on her shoulders.

"You may trust me, my dear, tell me all that is in your mind, it is safe with me; I loved your mother dearly, and I shall not betray her child's confidence."

"There is not much to tell," said Vera sadly, "you see I was only twelve when my mother died, and Mrs. Oldham came to look after the housekeeping; then when father married her and Nancy was born, I was sent to boarding school, and for five whole years I was only at home for a month at Christmas and six weeks in the summer. Mamma used to take me into town shopping, to buy me new clothes, and somehow beyond that, I never went out of Walden; the holidays went by so fast, and I was so pleased to be with father, it never struck me that hardly any one came to Whitehill, and mamma never was invited anywhere."

Mrs. Brice did not interrupt the speaker by a single word, but there was no mistaking her interest.

"When I came home at Christmas," went on Vera, "for good, it was different; when I had practised my music and read history for an hour, there really was nothing to do. Mamma wanted me to teach the children, but father said they were too small to do real lessons, and he would not have me turned into a nursemaid. You know mamma does a great deal in the house; I think she loves pottering about in the kitchen and dairy, but she didn't want me to help her,

and really I hardly knew how to get through my days."

"And my husband, finding how sweet your voice is, persuaded you to sing at our village concert last Easter," suggested Mrs. Brice. "I was always afraid Mrs. Norton objected to it."

"She was quite willing for me to sing, but—you know I met people there who had been old friends of my mother's and they asked me to go and see them; father was so pleased he insisted on my going, and I suppose I have been out a lot this summer. I never knew mamma was angry about it, she said nothing, and you know it was chiefly tennis parties, to which only young people were asked, but now that she's so angry about Albert, she brought up the other grievances, for she declares father treats her and her children like servants, while he makes a fine lady of me, and she says she won't have it any longer; and that if I'm not going to make myself useful at home I'd better go out as a governess."

Mrs. Brice put one arm round Vera, the girl had broken down now, and was sobbing bitterly.

The vicar's wife hardly knew how to comfort her.

Mrs. Oldham had come to the farm as a "working housekeeper"; people of the upper class remembering that, were not likely to invite her to their houses as an equal.

She was known to consort on friendly terms with the landlady of the "Grayhound," the village inn, and to have dropped in to tea in the housekeeper's room at Walden Castle.

Her husband showed no displeasure at this; he laid down two stringent rules that Vera should never accompany her on these visits, and that none of her "friends" should be asked to the farm; beyond this he left her free.

Mrs. Brice, who knew Mrs. Norton's jealous, sulky character, could quite understand it must have been bitter to her to see her stepdaughter take her place in society as a young lady, but then, what could be done? Vera could hardly be shut up and denied any society or pleasure suited to her years.

The vicar's wife had been ailing all the summer, and was confined to the house all September with low fever, going to the seaside as soon as she could be moved, therefore she had seen little of Walden festivities that year, and Vera's story came to her almost as a surprise.

"I am sure your father will never send you out into the world, Vera; you are too young, and there is no occasion for it; your mother's five thousand pounds were settled on you, and though this does not make you an heiress, it gives you a sufficient income."

"Mrs. Norton was so angry," said Vera, who seemed determined to pour out her troubles, "she told father I had been kept at an expensive school till I was eighteen, and yet he wanted Albert to leave when he was three years younger."

"I hope Mr. Norton told her your education was provided for out of your own money."

"He did; he told her I had never cost him a shilling since my mother's death, and that if I left home the trustees would certainly leave off paying him the interest of my fortune. It did not seem to appease her, she was simply furious."

"Will you come and stay with us?" asked Mrs. Brice, kindly, "you know how delighted I should be to have you, and the vicar could get your father's consent I feel sure."

But Vera thanked her and declined.

"It would be such a treat; but I can't leave home just now, father looks so troubled. You haven't seen him for a long time, dear Mrs. Brice; but when you do you will own he is changed."

Mrs. Brice knew from her husband that Mr. Norton looked old and worn, that he had had an exceptionally bad harvest, and had, it was reported, lost a heavy sum of money through standing security for a friend.

She had a real regard for the farmer, though she had been disappointed at his so soon forgetting his first wife, so she said not another word to urge Vera to come to her.

"Only remember, I have always a home for

you," she said, affectionately; "and then the Vicar and the tea-tray came in together."

"Katy, I've some news for you," said Mrs. Brice, as he enjoyed his muffins; "the Waldens have come home."

Vera and her godmother were equally amazed. Three years ago Lionel Walden, the heir of the grand old family, had broken his father's heart by marrying a French actress. The old Squire died from the blow.

His widow and the younger children went to live in London; but Lionel never brought his foreign wife to the Castle. Everything was left in the hands of an agent, and it seemed probable the grand old home would be permanently deserted. A few weeks before the news had come of Lionel Walden's death.

He was buried abroad, and people began to wonder what kind of a squire his younger brother would make while expectations and conjectures were rife as to whether the family would return to the Castle.

"It's quite true," went on the Vicar, "I was in the village when I saw the station-fly coming towards me. Noel got out and talked to me for quite five minutes. He said his mother could not bear the idea of coming back with a flourish of trumpets as it were, and so they were taking the Castle by storm. Servants and carriages would follow in a few days; but they wanted to come home themselves as quietly as possible."

"And Mabel?" asked Vera, anxiously, "has she come, too?"

"Vera, you forget; Mabel Walden was married last year, and went with her husband to India. Nathalie died soon after they left Walden. Of the happy family we remember at the Castle there are only two left, Noel and his mother."

"Lionel's death must make an enormous difference to Noel," said Mrs. Brice, thoughtfully, "from a needy barrister to Squire Walden is a great leap."

"Aye, but Lionel drained the property of every penny he could," said her husband. "Noel must economise for years if he is ever to restore the glories of Walden."

Vera said nothing. She was thinking of the old days of her childhood, when she and Mabel Walden had been playmates. Lionel, the heir, was ten years older than his pretty sister; but Noel had been their friend and champion always.

Vera could remember him a great rough schoolboy, far too boisterous for Lady Lucy's drawing-room; but who had been the sworn knight and defender of Mabel and her little friend. When Vera's mother was alive the three children had been well-nigh inseparable. Her death brought changes. Mabel and her brother came no longer to Whitehill Farm, but Lady Lucy had never forgotten Beaumont's child up to the time of the old Squire's death, when Vera was a lanky schoolgirl of sixteen, looking far less by dint of her shy timid manner.

"You are very silent, Vera," said the Vicar, presently, "is anything the matter, child?"

Mrs. Brice glanced quickly at her husband.

"I'm afraid the atmosphere of Whitehill Farm has been stormy lately," she said, gently. "I have been telling Vera if her father can spare her, we have always a home for her here."

"Always," said the clergyman, firmly; "both for her mother's sake and her own."

It was seven o'clock when Vera left the Vicarage; but the moon was up; and, besides, she knew every step of the way, and could have walked it blindfold.

She went slowly, for she was in no hurry to reach home, and, besides, she had much to think of. It seemed so wonderful that the Waldens had come home at last.

How well she remembered her last meeting with Noel the summer before his father's death. He was only a younger son then, and not a person of any consequence. He had been starting for Oxford, and he was talking to his old playmate of all he meant to do there.

"Father wants me to be a barrister; but I don't think I'm clever enough. I'd much rather go to Australia, and buy a sheep farm. Vera, you know when I have made my fortune I shall come back to Walden, and whether it is a sheep

farm or a big house in London; half of it is for you."

She had been only a child then. Now she was a woman grown, and Noel was her father's landlord—the head of the house of Walden, a very great man in the eyes of the Northshire people, and one who must marry an heiress or at least someone nobly born. Of course he had forgotten that parting in the hay-field; it would be madness to remember it.

"Vera."

The girl started, both her hands had been taken in a strong, warm clasp.

Noel Walden stood looking at her in the soft, silvery moonlight, as one who could not gaze enough, even as he repeated "Vera, is it possible."

She did not understand the change the years had made in her; could not judge of the difference between the shy, awkward schoolgirl he had left and the beautiful maiden he saw now, and so there was just a shadow of reproach in her reply.

"There is nothing surprising in my being here, Mr. Walden; this is the nearest way from the vicarage to Whitehill."

"I was going to see Mrs. Brice, but now I shall walk home with you instead. Vera, you are wonderfully altered; I think I show great discrimination in recognizing you."

"I should have known you anywhere," replied the farmer's daughter; "how is Lady Lucy? It must be a sad home-coming for her."

"My mother is a wonderful woman," he answered cheerfully; "she is full of hope and energy, she hardly looks a day older than when she went away in spite of all her troubles."

They made a charming picture as they turned to ascend the broad white hill which gave its name to the farm.

Vera Norton was rather above the middle height, a slight, graceful figure, a face with mobile expressive features; soft, curling brown hair, and large, flashing dark eyes; her complexion was fair, her colour fresh and rosy, as became a country girl.

But it was her eyes which were her greatest charm. They were beautiful eyes, and could reflect every feeling of her heart, by turns, proud, tender, scornful, and appealing, so that it was little wonder that her father could never refuse any request of hers when she looked at him with those large velvety brown eyes.

Noel Walden was so tall, that he towered well above her; a handsome, broad-shouldered fellow who stood six feet three in his stockings, he seemed just the sort of man to protect everything weak and helpless.

He was not particularly clever, indeed, his mother called him stupid, but he had a large true heart, and so that his affections had fair play, Noel Walden would make a noble, generous-minded man.

The silence was almost embarrassing—Vera broke it by asking—

"How is Mabel—Lady Brereton, I should say."

"I have not seen her since her wedding-day; they sailed that very night for India. If you will trust my opinion Mabel is absolutely unaltered, she looked such a variable baby I told my mother she ought to forbid the banns."

"And her husband."

"He's a good fellow," said Noel simply; "not clever or learned, but just wrapped up in Mabel, she'll be spoilt to a certainty, and yet one could not be sorry."

They were nearing Whitehill Farm, and Vera came to a deliberate stand-still.

"Good night, Mr. Walden."

"Are you not going to ask me in? I'm sure Mr. Norton would be glad to welcome me."

"Father won't be home till late."

"Oh," and the tone of that little word told Vera he had no desire to see her step-mother, "then I'll say good night. You must come and see my mother, Vera, she was always fond of you."

Vera made some inarticulate response, and, with a hurried "Good night," sped away through the big white gate which led to the front garden of the farm.

It was nearly eight. How she wished it had

not been market-day at Stockleigh, which meant her father would not be home till supper-time.

Innocent as she was of all offence, Vera Norton shrank from a *tête-à-tête* with her step-mother.

The door was opened by a respectable-looking servant, who had lived at the farm long enough to be used to Mrs. Norton's hectoring ways, and perhaps to put up with them for the sake of her master and the children.

She lowered her voice cautiously as she said—

"I'd not go into the parlour, Miss Vera; there's company."

Vera followed Joan into the kitchen, the very picture of comfort, with a huge fire burning in the open range, and a savoury smell coming from a saucepan on the hob.

The girl placed a chair close to the welcome blaze, and stretched out her hands to warm them as she enquired—

"Who's here, Joan; has father come home?"

"The master's not in yet, Miss Vera, and I can't rightly say who the visitor is, he looks an evil, ill-favoured fellow enough, he got here about six, and asked for Mrs. Norton; she went to him at once, and soon rang for tea. He's eaten up the best part of the cold fowl I was keeping for master's supper, and emptied the cream jug, but he's still shut in there with the mistress, and she looks that put out I thought I'd give you a hint not to go in."

"I'm very much obliged to you, Joan; I'd much rather not meet a stranger."

"The master'll be in by half-past eight," went on Joan, "and I'd like to be setting supper, but I doubt the mistress'll let me go in."

"I should try," answered Vera; "father will be so cold and hungry when he comes."

There were three sitting-rooms at Whitehill farm, but under the present Mrs. Norton's sway a fire was lighted only in one, and so during the winter months the other two were of little use. Vera went upstairs to take off her things; returning to the kitchen she found Joan busy preparing supper.

"Missis said I could bring it in now, Miss Vera, he's going to stay the night."

"What!"

"Never since the advent of her stepmother had a guest slept at the farm, and for this unexpected stranger to be the first seemed odd."

"It's quite true, Miss, I'm to get the blue-room ready for him, and a lot of work it means, for it's not been slept in since the boys went back to school. Your Ma's asking for you, Miss Vera, she seems in a regular taking."

Gladly would Vera have remained where she was, at any rate till her father returned, but Mrs. Norton's harsh voice was heard calling her, and further delay was unwise, so she rose reluctantly, and quitted the cosy, comfortable kitchen, walking slowly to the parlour almost as though some presentiment had warned her that this stranger brought trouble in his wake.

CHAPTER II.

The parlour at Whitehill farm was a long low-ceilinged room, with French windows all down one side, opening on to the garden, and two doors, one leading straight into the kitchen; it might have been made into a charming quaint old-world looking place, but Julia Norton had little taste and possessed an inordinate love of colours; under her auspices a gay paper, with huge impossible flowers of every shade, had been hung above the dark oak panellings, which reached half way to the ceiling. She declared it was waste of time to polish the old oak floor which had once been kept bare, save for two or three rugs, so now it was covered with a common felt druggat, as gaudy as the paper. The oak side-board and cupboards she had left untouched, but the chairs were covered in red and green chintz, some cheap vases were on the mantelpiece, and a huge antimacassar of knitted stripes of chocolate and blue covered the sofa; it was little wonder that Vera, who could remember the dear old home in her mother's time, hated the sight of the room, or that the farmer himself did not particularly admire its splendours. Mrs. Norton sat by the

fire, a tall, large-featured woman with a florid complexion, and small beady black eyes; opposite her was the visitor whom Joan had called "ill-favoured." He was a man of about thirty-five, shabbily dressed and yet with an attempt at fashion about him, a Londoner, probably, from his alert manner and quick sharp glance.

Without endorsing Joan's verdict Vera thought, as she entered the parlour, her step-mother's guest was not a person whose society her father would appreciate.

"Vera," said Mrs. Norton, with a short jerky nod towards the stranger, "this is my brother, Mr. Blake; Bryan, this is Andrew's girl."

Vera bowed and said nothing, the stranger looked at her much as though she had been a dog or a horse exhibited for his inspection, and was equally deaf to his remarks:

"A fine girl upon my word, Ju, and knows it too. I expect, they mostly do."

Vera would gladly have left the room, but her stepmother's eye was fixed on her and she knew her flight would give offence, besides, she would have to return. In simple households like that at Whitehill farm the inmates had to appear at meals or go fasting, her father must surely come in soon, never in her life had she longed for him as she did now.

"Where have you been to, child?" asked Mrs. Norton, with an attempt at graciousness, drawing forward a chair. "You look almost blue with the cold, sit down and warm yourself."

"I'm not cold now, thanks, I was very cold when I first came in."

"You stayed at the vicarage to tea?"

"Yes, Mrs. Brice seems much better. The Vicar thinks she will soon be quite well again."

"More's the pity," said Mrs. Norton sharply; "if she kept delicate there'd be some hope of Mr. Brice exchanging with someone in the south. I'm sure its time we had a change of clergymen; as curate and vicar this one's been here over thirty years."

"But the people are so fond of him," said Vera gently; "everyone would be grieved if he went away."

"I should not, for one," said Mrs. Norton. "The Brices give themselves airs and only cotton to the country folks and gentry. The living's only worth two hundred a year; give us a man who had to live on that, and could be civil to all his parishioners, say I."

Vera thought the poor people would come badly off in that case, and that any how it was hardly the Vicar's fault that he had ample private means, but she said nothing, for her quick ear had caught the sound of her father's voice.

Another moment and she would have flown to meet him.

"Stay here," said Mrs. Norton sharply, "and keep my brother company, I want to speak to your father."

Doubtless she wished to explain Mr. Blake's sudden arrival, her unwonted hospitality and the strange fact that though she had come to Whitehill avowedly without a relative in the world save her two helpless children, she yet possessed a living brother.

Left alone with the stranger, Vera Norton felt an unaccountable embarrassment, not so much because she had never seen him before (in the last year Vera had met so many fresh people that she had quite conquered her girlish shyness) as because he was so utterly unlike all those to whose acquaintance she was accustomed; he was shabby and yet his attire had pretensions; there was something reckless and defiant in his manner, yet his dark eye had the same sharpness that marked Mrs. Norton's. Vera decided she would have known they were brother and sister just from this one trait of resemblance.

He tapped the fender impatiently with his boot as though tired of waiting.

"Your father seems a long time, young lady. Perhaps he is not particularly pleased to welcome a near relation, or fears it is one who happens to be a trifle down on his luck."

"My father never measures people by their prosperity," said Vera, coldly, "but he will be very much surprised. He had no idea his wife had a brother."

"Ah!" Mr. Blake looked round the room approvingly, "Julia's done well for herself. She always was a sharp one. Not like your humble servant who's much too easy going."

As the door opened Vera made a step towards her father, as though she felt it a comfort even to be near him.

Mr. Norton put one hand on her shoulder caressingly, and held out the other to his unexpected guest.

"You are welcome, Mr. Blake, for your sister's sake."

That was all. Joan speedily brought in the supper, to which (despite his previous raid on the cold chicken) Bryan did ample justice. When they rose from the table Vera said good-night.

"I am so tired, father," she explained.

Mr. Norton lighted her candle and followed her into the hall.

"What's the matter, child?"

She gave one backward glance to the room they had left, and whispered,—

"Is he going to stay?"

"Only till to-morrow," said Mr. Norton with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. "Sleep well, my dear, and don't worry."

It was only as she reached the shelter of her own room the girl remembered she had quite forgotten to tell him of the Waldens return and of her own meeting with the young squire.

Mr. Norton did not return to the parlour immediately. He went to the front door, and gazed out into the starlight sky, almost as though he needed time to give him courage.

It was a strange story his wife had poured into his ears. This was the brother Bryan whom she had long believed dead. He had been sheep-farming in Australia all these years, and having made a modest "pile" had come home to settle down in the old country.

"Be kind to him for my sake," Julia had urged; "he has no relations nearer than my boys. He is not likely to marry, and he may do a great deal for them."

Unfortunately Andrew Norton knew by sad experience that the woman he had married never scrupled to tell a falsehood when it served her. How much of her story now was true he could not tell. Bryan Blake did not give the farmer the impression of a man who had made his fortune, and it was certainly strange she had never mentioned him in all these years.

"Well," said Norton to himself as he bolted and barred the front door, "the fellow must have a night's shelter; but I won't encourage him to stay here. I don't like the look of him."

He found Mrs. Norton had gone to bed, and the stranger was alone. The farmer was the soul of hospitality, he produced pipes and whisky, and prepared to entertain Bryan for an hour before retiring. On the whole he was favourably surprised by the man's conversation. Blake showed himself well-informed on most subjects and evidently had plenty of common-sense. He spoke very plainly of his own prospects. He had made five thousand pounds, and could have made more had he remained abroad, but he got a strong attack of home-sickness and could not make up his mind to stay in Australia.

"Ten years is a good slice out of a man's life," he said, frankly. "I know my money is not much to rich folk; but it ought to be enough to stock a small farm and leave a nest egg over. I understand farming thoroughly, and it'll go hard if I can't make a living. I've been telling Julia she'd better trust one of the boys to me, and let me bring him up as my own; it's hard on you to have to provide for two strapping lads with no earthly claim on you."

He had gone the sure way to Mr. Norton's favour. No human creature guessed at the hard struggle Andrew had to make both ends meet. Nothing but the interest of Vera's fortune had kept him afloat so long. It was only the bitterest necessity which had made him resolve to remove Albert Oldham from school at Christmas. He was fond of both his stepsons and would gladly have given them every advantage but for bad seasons. Bad harvests and sundry farming losses had tried him very severely. The five

hundred pounds for which he had been security for a friend had only been raised by giving a bill of sale on his furniture and farming plant. Unless the coming season was a good one, ruin stared him in the face.

There had been Nortons at Whitehill Farm for many generations. Vera's father had hoped to live out all his days at the old homestead, even though no son of his could come after him; but of late he had had a sore fear this could not be.

He knew if things did not take a turn there was no help for it but to give up Whitehill and engage himself either as steward, bailiff to some great landowner, or as manager for some youngster whose guardians wanted his farm in good hands during his minority.

Perhaps it was the thought of his own troubles which made him listen so patiently to Bryan Blake's confidences; but he was not in the least prepared by them for the idea which had taken root in his wife's brain.

"Andrew," she said, quietly, when he went to bed, "why should not Bryan go into partnership with you? You are always declaring you can't get on without more capital. He might pay two thousand for a half share, and that would make things easier for you and keep him near us so that no one took my boys' place in his affections."

"Money transactions between connections never answer, Julia," said Mr. Norton, gravely. "I don't know that I should consent even if your brother wished it, and I shall be extremely annoyed if you suggest it to him."

"I suppose you think Bryan's not good enough for you?" she said, tartly. "He's not an idle fine gentleman, I own."

"My dear," said poor Norton, gravely, "he is your brother, and I should like to think well of him. I have only been two hours in his company so it would not be fair to judge; but I don't fancy he is the sort to suit a quiet plodding family like ours."

Wonderful to relate Mrs. Norton said no more, but she was awake till the small hours of the morning plotting and planning.

She had made up her mind of two things. Bryan Blake should remain at Whitehill Farm as her husband's partner, and he should marry Vera.

After her eager protestations about no one rivalling her boys with their uncle she fancied her husband would never suspect her design. It was a cruel plot she had hatched against her kind, generous-hearted husband and his best-loved child, but then the strongest traits of her character were a jealous dislike of Vera, and a cunning avarice where her own brood was concerned.

For years Andrew Norton had kept from Julia the fact that his first wife's fortune was settled on her child. It was only a few days before when she had tauntingly declared Vera was a burden, and ought to go out into the world and earn her bread that he had been stung into telling her the truth. Until his daughter was twenty-one or until her marriage, if that event came first, two hundred and fifty pounds a year were paid by her trustees to him for her support.

"And I can tell you, Julia, but for that money I could never have held on. It has enabled me to pay my rent like clockwork. It's been a positive godsend to me to feel that, bad harvests or good, the rent was ready and a good bit besides. What I shall do when the child is twenty-one or marries I can't think."

"If Vera is as fond of you as she pretends to be," snapped Mrs. Norton, "she will make over the principal to you."

"She can't," returned the farmer, gravely; "and I'm thankful for it. Until she's a married woman, Vera has no more power over her capital than I have."

Mrs. Norton was a cunning woman and a secretive one. She had never alluded to her own family since coming to Whitehill beyond a general statement that she had no near relation; but after this conversation with her husband, unsuspected by any one, the mistress of the farm wrote two or three letters which she posted with her own hand.

The result of this correspondence was the arrival of Mr. Bryan Blake at Walden.

He had never been in Australia in his life, and he had not five thousand pence, much less five thousand pounds; but he had a tolerable knowledge of farming, and he had no inconvenient scruples. He had heard nothing of his sister for years, and was not a little surprised at her suddenly remembering his existence.

However, he was "down on his luck," and as Mrs. Norton sent the money for his journey and assured him of her husband's hospitality, he concluded he might as well obey her summons.

She put the matter before him with great frankness—brutal plainness he called it. Her husband was in great straits for money, unless a good round sum could be found within six months ruin stared them in the face. If she helped Bryan to marry Vera Norton would be content that two thousand pounds of the girl's small fortune should go to her father's help. As Mrs. Norton put it, Andrew was such an idiot where Vera was concerned, he would go headlong to the workhouse rather than sacrifice her ever so little. He must be persuaded Bryan was a skilful farmer with capital to invest, and never suspect that the sum paid as his brother-in-law's contribution to the partnership came from Vera's dowry.

Bryan had not a shilling in his pocket. He had lost heavily at some autumn races, and had been living from hand-to-mouth since. Nothing could have suited him better than free quarters at the farm, and he agreed at once to try and follow the course marked out for him by his sister. If he failed he should have lost nothing, and would have gained several weeks' board and lodging. Regarding matrimony, he said truly he had never had money enough to think of taking a wife, but he admired pretty girls as much as any one, and felt quite able to win their favour.

Vera was feeding her pigeons early the next morning, when her father came up to her. The windows of the parlour faced the other way, so he felt quite safe from his wife's observation.

"My dear, I've promised Julia (he seldom called her 'your mother' to Vera) her brother shall stay with us for a week or so. It seems she's the only relation he has in England, and she's set her hopes on his doing something for the boys. Blake's not our sort, Vera, but I don't think he's a bad sort of fellow, and for peace sake, child, I want you to be civil to him."

The girl put one little hand on her father's arm.

"I'll do my best," she said gently, "but I don't think I shall like him. I am surprised mother thinks he can help the boys. Why, I took him for a poor relation, who had found her out and wanted her assistance!"

"So did I; but it seems he made a pile in Australia. I fancy, dear, that accounts a little for his want of polish. He may have lived in a very uncivilized place, you know!"

"So he may," returned Vera, dismissing the subject. "Father, do you know the Waldens have come home? I met Noel last night."

"The Squire," corrected Andrew Norton gently; "times are changed now. Yes, I heard in the village he and his mother had arrived. It must be a sad home-coming for Lady Lucy."

"May I go and see her? I didn't want to ask you before mamma, she wouldn't understand. You know, father, it's not because Lady Lucy lives at a Castle, and is the great lady of Walden that I want to go, but just because she always was so kind to me, and I should like to welcome her home!"

The farmer hesitated.

"You're not a child now, dear. You and Mabel Walden were playfellows as little girls, but now it's all different; Mabel is Lady Brereton and you—?"

"I am Vera Norton, as I always shall be," returned the girl simply.

"Wait a day or so," decided the farmer. "If Lady Lucy wants to see you she'll find some way of letting you know it, and I can't bear to think of your going anywhere, dear, and finding yourself slighted or unwelcome!"

CHAPTER III.

It was just a week later, and Noel Walden sat at breakfast with his mother in the beautiful old dining-room at the Castle. It was a very silent meal, for both were busy with their letters. At last Lady Lucy looked up and said,—

"I have heard from Ida. The dear girl says she is not at all afraid of being dull, and will be delighted to come to us next week and stay over Christmas."

Noel looked at his mother gravely. He was only twenty-four, but there were times when he seemed much older, this was one of them.

Lady Lucy was puzzled at his silence, she was barely fifty even now, and a very gracious, fascinating woman. The son, who had disappointed her and broken his father's heart, was her favourite. Noel she had never quite understood, but of her four children he was the only one who had ever dared to oppose her to her face. Lionel had stooped to deceive her, and let the news of his disgraceful marriage reach Walden from a stranger, but he had never in his life objected to her face to any wish of hers. Noel's silence exasperated his mother.

"Of course it is your house now," she said bitterly, "and you have a right to choose who shall be invited here, but I can't see why you should object to Ida Melville."

Then Noel spoke.

"I think Ida Melville one of the nicest women I know," he answered gravely; "and if you have asked her here for your own sake I shall be delighted to welcome her; but, mother, I don't want to deceive you, its no use asking her for mine!"

"I don't understand," said Lady Lucy stiffly. "Ida Melville is a charming girl. She is an heiress, and if you ever marry at all your wife must have money. After your brother's terrible *malchance* I shall never have an hour's peace till you are respectively settled."

Noel sighed.

"Let us understand each other once for all, mother. I like, I may say more, in a brotherly way, I am fond of Ida Melville. There was a time when I confidently believed she would be my sister, just as I am convinced now that it is for Lionel's sake she has remained single all these years."

"Don't speak as though she were fifty," said Lady Lucy, fretfully.

"She is twenty-five," replied Noel, "and I believe she has made up her mind to remain unmarried, but even if I am mistaken it makes no difference. I shall never marry except for love, and I am not in love with Ida."

Lady Lucy stared at him.

"You'll tell me next your affections are already engaged; perhaps that you are bound to some miserable actress like your brother; but you must remember your position is very different from Lionel's. When the interest of the mortgages are paid you've nothing but a beggarly eight hundred a-year. My fortune is entirely at my own disposal, and if you marry against my wishes I shall make you no allowance now, and leave you nothing at my death."

"You need not use threats, mother," he said, gently, "I am not thinking of marrying, that is at present. She is very young, almost a child, I don't want even to speak to her of my hopes just yet."

"Then there is someone! Noel, it is of no use your trying to deceive me. Tell me, frankly, who is it?"

"I never deceived you in my life, mother—it is Vera Norton."

"Vera Norton! Why, you haven't seen her for years. The daughter of your own tenant, too; it's ridiculous!"

"I have seen her once since we came home. She has grown from a child to a beautiful woman; but it isn't her beauty only; there has never been a time since I was a great rough school boy, that I did not hope some day to marry Vera. If you think her so beneath me, mother, why did you let her grow up almost as a child of the house?"

"It was foolish," confessed Lady Lucy, "but I was very fond of her mother. I knew Vera was

too young for there to be any danger of Lionel's fancying her, and you were only a boy."

"You will keep my secret, mother," he said earnestly, "it may be months before I tell her of my hopes; but if I do not win Vera Norton you will never see wife of mine."

"Her father is only a farmer, and Mrs. Norton is about as refined as my housekeeper. They are great friends, by the way, Mrs. Norton has often been to tea with Sims."

Noel winced.

"Vera is no blood relation of the present Mrs. Norton; her own mother you must admit was a graceful, refined gentlewoman."

"Well," said Lady Lucy, after a long pause, "you have disappointed me terribly; but at least you are not pledged yet. You may see your mistake in time, and meanwhile I suppose you have no objection to my enjoying dear Ida's companionship."

"Not the least. I will go and meet her if you tell me the train."

And when the day came, Lady Lucy having a severe cold, Noel drove alone to the station to meet Miss Melville. She was a distant cousin of his mother's, and at one time had been a great deal at Walden Castle, but though only a year older than Noel, he had seen very little of her comparatively, she and Natalie always pairing off with Lionel while Noel and little Mabel were inseparable.

Miss Melville was not beautiful, her hair was too thin, her complexion too sallow, there was a great want of colour about her, eyebrows and lashes being so faint as to be almost imperceptible, while her hair was a dull shade of flaxen, but very kind, friendly grey eyes, and a pleasant smile redeemed her from the charge of plainness, and Noel welcomed her with a warmth that was quite sincere. As a friend he was much attached to Ida, though he could never become her lover.

"Are you settling down now?" asked Miss Melville, as they drove off, leaving her maid to follow with the luggage. It was pouring with rain, so Noel was glad he had brought the close carriage. "It must have been hard at first."

"Do you know, Ida," said Noel, sadly, "I think it gets harder every day. At first there was a touch of excitement about it, now, mother and I have found out how much we miss the others. Of all her four children I am the one least able to please her, so that it seems unkind fate should have left her only me."

The distant cousinship and the old intimacy made it possible for him to speak thus plainly, and Ida Melville understood him perfectly.

"Wouldn't you be happier if Cousin Lucy moved to the Dower House?"

"She would be miserable there alone. You see, Ida, she had never realized Lal's death till she came home to the Castle. I declare sometimes, I wish he had left a child, poor fellow. It might have been some comfort to mother now. I know there are times when she almost hates me for standing in Lal's place."

"Noel," cried Miss Melville, as he finished, "there's a young lady just in front getting wet through, couldn't we offer her a lift. She will catch a fearful cold for this rain is drenching. Do ask if she is going to Walden."

Noel was out of the carriage in a moment. He started when he recognised the little dripping figure.

"Vera," he said, anxiously, "you must let us drive you home. My cousin, Miss Melville, is horrified at the thought of the cold laid up in store for you."

Vera let herself be persuaded, and took the seat by Ida's side, Noel placing himself opposite.

"I remember your face perfectly," said Ida, "you used to be always with Mabel, though just now I can't think of your name."

"It is Miss Norton, of Whitehill Farm," said Noel, "I ought to have introduced you."

Ida took the girl's hand in her's, and asked, kindly,—

"How do you come to be out in such a storm, Miss Norton?"

Vera blushed crimson.

"I thought it would hold up till I got to the

Vicarage, but it came down so heavily I had to turn back."

"We will take you to Whitehill," said Miss Melville, "and you must put on dry things or you will be laid up. It is wonderful how violent this rain is."

She was very quick-sighted, and she felt certain that the poor child by her side was in trouble, and wanted to get to the Vicarage to pour out her grief to the kind friends there.

Ida remembered Mrs. Brice perfectly, and guessed what a ready sympathy she would have for anyone in sorrow; but it was too late for Miss Norton to go to her to-day, and so Ida tried her best to cheer her, and bring a smile to the wistful face.

"I am going to stay at Walden for a long time, Miss Norton, I hope you will come and see me."

"You mustn't expect it, Ida," said Noel, rather crossly; "mother has been home three weeks, but Vera has never once found time to come to the Castle. She is forgetting her old friends."

"I am not good at forgetting," said Vera, two red spots burning on her cheeks. "I did think of coming to see Lady Lucy, but my father said I had better not."

"How in the world have we offended Mr. Norton?" demanded the Squire. "I met him last week and he was quite friendly."

"It's not that he's offended," here poor Vera blushed more than ever; "but he said I was not a child any longer, and Lady Lucy might think it presumption if I went to see her uninvited."

Ida Melville felt for the girl's embarrassment, and put one hand on her arm with a kindly caressing gesture.

"Will you come and see me, Miss Norton? I shall be so pleased to meet some one connected with the old days when we were all young folks. I write to Mabel pretty often, and I know she will be delighted to have news of her old play-fellow."

The carriage deposited Vera at the farm and a great silence fell on the other two. It was Miss Melville who broke it at last.

"How beautiful that child has grown; but who is worrying her? She has not a happy face, Noel."

"Her father married a woman not fit to associate with his own equals, and I think now Vera is grown up her stepmother puts on her. Ida, shall I tell you a secret?"

"Not if it concerns Vera Norton," said his cousin, smiling. "Why, Noel, there's no one like an old maid to find out a love affair. I knew by the way you looked at her it rested with that pretty child to be mistress of Walden Castle."

"She hasn't a shilling," said Noel, who really believed it; "and I fear her father is in hopeless difficulties, so I suppose it's not surprising my mother's angry; but, Ida, don't you begin to preach prudence, I can't stand it, I'm too far gone."

"I'm not given to preaching, Noel. She is a dear little thing, and will make a charming chiteline, only—"

"Go on," he said, smiling, "I don't mind what you say after that."

"Only she doesn't look strong enough to fight against other people's wills. When you propose to her, Noel, you ought to marry her straight off or she will be worried into her grave by your mother."

"You don't think then the *mater* will come round?"

"Not till she realises it's hopeless to object. She's capable of going to your Vera and assuring her such a marriage would ruin all your prospects. No, Noel, when once you have 'spoken out,' if you're accepted you'd better be married straight away. Interference has wrecked so many lives."

It had wrecked her own. Noel knew that she had been tacitly engaged to his brother Lionel; but her father, a very stern, proud man, thought her too young to marry, and had insisted on a year's probation.

Lionel went abroad and met the woman for whose sake he ruined all his prospects. When the time of probation was up he made some ex-

cuse for delaying his return, and then came the news of his disgraceful marriage.

Sir Henry Melville did soon after with the bitter knowledge that his caution had blighted his child's happiness.

"You'll help me, won't you, Ida?" breathed young Walden, eagerly. "I think every hope of my heart is bound up in winning Vera. Her father's one of the noblest-looking men I ever met. It could only be an honour to belong to him; and for Vera's sake I could put up with a more vulgar connection than her stepmother."

CHAPTER IV.

THE plot was thickening, and thus far Mrs. Norton was not dissatisfied with its success, some of her private board had purchased her brother more presentable attire; he kept steady (her fears on that score had been great), made himself useful on the farm, fairly earning his board, Andrew Norton admitted, and had so far ingratiated himself with the master of Whitehill that his desire to advance two thousand pounds and become his brother-in-law's partner had not been positively refused.

With Vera he felt far less confident. It was very difficult to get a word alone with her, and still more difficult to turn the rare chance to his advantage, for Vera Norton seemed to look on Mr. Blake as a contemporary of her father, and never dreamed that he could have any special interest in her.

She was out a good deal at the vicarage, and elsewhere, whilst Miss Melville often insisted on having her at the Castle, so that Bryan Blake did not find his wooing advance with as much speed as he could desire.

"You should have more spirit," his sister told him, "no girl would like such shilly-shallying."

"It's my belief, Julia, if I proposed to her to-morrow, she'd laugh at me."

"She is not particularly happy at home," said Mrs. Norton, snappishly, "I've taken care of that, and there's no one else likely to propose to her, there're not three unmarried men in the neighbourhood."

"There's one at Walden Castle."

"What?"

For one moment Mrs. Norton was really alarmed, then she said scornfully,

"Noel Walden has a mother who'll look after him a great deal better than that. He and Vera were children together, but you need not be afraid of him, and, really Bryan, the sooner you speak out the better."

Mr. Blake volunteered to walk to the vicarage that evening and fetch Vera home. Andrew Norton accepted, he really found Blake improve on acquaintance; and though he would never have dreamed of giving her to him as his wife, he saw no harm in his being Vera's escort for the two miles which lay between the Brices and the farm; indeed, at this time Mr. Norton was so worried over money matters that he had little time to think of aught else.

Bryan Blake did not "go in" at the vicarage, but sent a message to Vera that he had come to meet her. In a minute or two she appeared well wrapped up, and they commenced their walk, the man's quick eyes taking in at once that something had upset her, for she was not in the good spirits which usually followed a visit to her godmother.

Poor Mrs. Brice little guessed the wound she had inflicted on her favourite by her simple, kindly meant hope that Ida Melville would marry the young squire, and so become mistress of Walden Castle after all.

"You're too young to remember it, Vera, but she was as good as engaged to Lionel; it was the most suitable match, for the Waldens were never rich for their position, and she has a large fortune. Miss Melville has always been just like a daughter to Lady Lucy, and I am sure the poor lady will be delighted at her marrying Noel."

Vera could remember several meetings with the young squire since his return to Walden, which had given her a sweet strange conviction

he had not forgotten his old dream of wedding his little playfellow. . . had he been jesting with her, and winning her heart to pass an idle hour while his hand was promised to Miss Melville? It was hard to believe this of Noel, but the doubt rankled in Vera's heart quite sufficiently to rob her of her spirits.

"Your father seems upset," said Bryan Blake, as they turned away from the vicarage; "it seems to me he'll worry himself into a bad illness if someone doesn't prevent it."

Vera roused herself to ask—

"Is there any fresh trouble, Mr. Blake?"

"Nothing fresh, I take it. You know, I suppose, that he's been losing money steadily for years. Now he's given a bill of sale on the furniture of his house and the farm plant. He says a good season may save him even yet; but if he goes on worrying from now till harvest he'll be ill first."

"If only I had some money I could get at," breathed the girl; "poor father, he loves every acre of the farm, it would break his heart to leave Whitehill."

"He never need leave it, Vera, if you'll listen to me," said Bryan Blake. "Your father's a proud man, and he won't take help from me, or my bit of money's at his service. If you will be my wife, perhaps then he'll feel I've some sort of a claim to help him. I'm not a fine gentleman, my girl, and I can't talk like one, but if you'll cast in your lot with mine you shall never repent it. I could go into partnership with your father then and see him through his difficulties, and though Julia's my own sister, I'll not deny she's often uncommon hard on you, but I know how to manage her, and I'll soon put a stop to that!"

It was only then that he paused long enough for Vera to make her voice heard.

"I am very sorry," she said simply. "I had no idea of this. I cannot marry you, Mr. Blake, even to help my father."

"Why not?" he asked sharply. "I'm not such a bad-looking fellow, and I'm a young man still, only five-and-thirty!"

"It isn't that," said Vera gravely, beginning to wish she was at home; "but I have no love to give you, Mr. Blake, and I don't believe in marrying without love!"

He was not a gentleman, or he could not have made his next speech. It was cowardly at any time, but now to Vera's aching heart it seemed brutal.

"I suppose you are waiting for the young Squire, but he'll fly at higher game than a farmer's daughter. Oh, I know all about it. He meets you in the lanes and walks by your side very lovingly, but he's only amusing himself. His fiancée's up at the Castle now. A young woman with gold enough to patch up his broken fortunes and set him on his legs again. It's only poor wretches like me that can afford to marry for love!"

He had caught her hand, and would have drawn her to his side, but with a piercing shriek she wrenched her self from his grasp and rushed on at a head-long pace, hardly knowing what she did; while Blake followed slowly, triumphant that he had roused her at last.

"You'd better give in and listen to reason," he said, as Vera, panting had to pause to recover her breath, and he easily came up with her. "It's no use to excite yourself you know, my pretty one."

A wild cry for help, the sound of approaching footsteps, and then a stinging blow, which sent Bryan Blake rolling he hardly knew where. Vera felt both her hands taken in a warm close clasp, as Noel Walden asked anxiously,—

"My darling, has he hurt you? What has the beggar dared to do?"

"No more beggar than you, sir," said Blake, regaining his feet; "and I'll trouble you to clear out and leave the young woman alone. Her father sent me to fetch her, and as we're courting we'd prefer no company but our own."

The truth came to Noel like magic, this scoundrel, whoever he was, was intoxicated. In truth, Bryan Blake had indulged very freely in his brother-in-law's whisky before leaving the

farm, thinking it would give him Dutch courage and make his wooing more impassioned.

Noel could feel the trembling of the hand he still held, and for Vera's sake he spoke to her persecutor with none of the utter scorn he felt.

"You are a relation of Mrs. Norton's, I believe? You had better go home to her; I will attend this young lady when she is ready."

"I won't give her up to you or any other man!"

"You have felt the strength of my arm once; leave us or I will knock you down a second time. If I'd a stick I would give you the horse-whipping you really deserve," cried Noel, giving free rein to his anger in his rage at the other's obstinacy.

Like all blustersers Bryan Blake was a coward at heart; he slunk off like a benten hound, and Noel Walden was free to give all his attention to Vera.

She needed it. So still and lifeless did she seem that even his inexperienced eyes told him she must have fainted. He picked her up in his arms. She was but a feather's weight to his strength, and carried her back to the vicarage. Mrs. Brice, alarmed at the ringing of the front door-bell at such an hour, came out into the hall.

"I think the villain's killed her—with fright," said Noel, bitterly, as he followed the lady into her little sitting-room and laid Vera on the sofa. "I found her with that fellow who's staying at the farm. I don't thoroughly know the rights of the story even yet; but I think he was trying to terrify her into promising to marry him."

"Was it Bryan Blake, Mrs. Norton's brother?"

"I don't know. He said her father had sent him to fetch her home, but surely it can't be true. Norton must be in his dotage."

"Leave Vera to my wife and the maid," said the Vicar, gently; "indeed, Noel, your face is enough to frighten her when she comes to."

He took the young man into his study and shut the door.

"Noel," he said, very gravely, "is your anxiety about poor little Vera quite fair to Ida Melville?"

"Good gracious!" cried poor Noel, angrily, "you don't mean my mother has been making you believe in that. Why, Ida Melville is my chief confidante, she agrees with me Vera is a prize worth sacrificing a great deal for. Ida and I are almost brother and sister for we both know her heart is buried in Lionel's grave."

The Vicar gave a sigh of unutterable relief.

"Lady Lucy told my wife she hoped you and Miss Melville would be married in the spring, and she wished it widely known. As your manner was so cordial, she feared you might be raising groundless hopes in another quarter; of course we knew she meant our poor little Vera. I will confess, Noel, neither my wife nor I could have forgiven you had you trifled with that child."

"Trifle with her. Why, I have loved her ever since I can remember. I think she knows my hopes, though I have never yet spoken to her of them openly. It seemed to me better to wait until I had been home a little longer. She was such a child, I did not want to frighten her; but I won't wait another day, or this cruel fabrication of my mother's may reach her ears."

"Do you mean to tell me Bryan Blake was actually proposing to Vera?"

"I do. He went so far as to assure me, in his coarse way, that they were courting, and didn't want any company but their own. I feel just now as though I could never forgive Andrew Norton. I tell you the scoundrel was perfectly intoxicated, and yet Norton had trusted him to fetch Vera."

"The farmer is the most unsuspicious man I ever knew," said James Brice, gently; "and he has a hard time of it just now, don't be hard on him, Noel."

"Everyone shakes their head when Whitehill Farm is mentioned. I wish you would tell me the rights of it, Mr. Brice. Is it only that Norton has lost money—or what?"

"He has lost money steadily for years; lately he stood security for a friend who left him to pay a good round sum. Then I fancy he has lost heart as well as gold. Mrs. Norton is not exactly the woman to cheer a man in misfortune; I can't tell you more. Andrew Norton avoids

us steadily; you see he knows we never approved of his second marriage."

"Whatever made him do it?" inquired Noel. "The woman wasn't pretty, or even fascinating."

"She persuaded him that people were talking about them, and that marriage was the only recompense he could offer her. He was an easy-going man, and gave in rather than have any bother."

Noel Warden sighed. The Vicar was quick to understand his troubled face.

"I don't think you need fear any intrusion from Vera's relations if you marry her," he said gravely. "Andrew Norton is almost painfully sensitive. He has withdrawn entirely from society since his second marriage, forsaking even such old friends as Mrs. Brice and myself. Besides, poor fellow, if things are as bad as I fear, he won't be long at Whitehill."

Mrs. Brice came in then with an anxious face.

"I have sent one of the maids for a doctor, James. Mr. Walden, would you mind going to the farm and telling Mr. Norton Vera cannot possibly return to-night. I would not trouble you, only as you actually saw what happened, you will be able to explain her illness to her father better than anyone else."

It was with very angry feelings that Noel Walden walked up to Whitehill. Mr. Norton himself opened the door. Alarmed at Vera's delay, and even more alarmed at the state in which Bryan Blake had returned to the farm, he was just preparing himself to go in search of his child.

He took his landlord into the disused drawing-room. How dull and damp it felt on this winter's night. Noel did not spare him. He declared that Vera had been terrified almost out of her senses by Blake's insolence, that she was still unconscious, and Mrs. Brice thought it would be better for her to remain the night at the vicarage.

"And, Mr. Norton," added the young man earnestly, "I entreat you not to let Vera return to the farm until you have got rid of Blake. I assure you he is not fit even to be in the same house with her."

"I shall turn him out of the place to-morrow," said Andrew Norton sadly. "It's never been pleasant to me to have him here; but he's made a pile out in Australia, and my wife wanted him to go into partnership with me. But what you've told me, Squire, and what I've seen to-night, settles the question once and for all. I'd rather leave Whitehill—and it'll come to that, than have a drunkard to deal with."

"Can't your affairs be set straight?" asked Noel a little awkwardly. "People lose money and yet recover themselves in time. We lost enough in my poor brother's time, but I mean to retrench and stick to the Castle; can't you do the same at Whitehill?"

Norton shook his head.

"You are young, Mr. Walden, and have the best years of your life before you—but I've not heart and courage; I don't seem to have any nerve left to battle with my troubles."

"This is a strange time to speak of such a subject," said Noel simply, "but I would rather have no further concealment. Mr. Norton, the dearest wish of my heart is to marry your daughter. It is my own love for Vera that makes me so indignant with Blake's audacity. Will you give me your consent and wish success to my wooing?"

"It would be madness," said Norton frankly. "Everyone declares your one chance of clearing off the mortgages is a wealthy marriage."

"I shall never marry any wife except your daughter Vera," said Noel earnestly. "From what I know of her I feel she would not mind beginning life quietly, and living economically until I had cleared off a few of the liabilities left by poor Lionel. Mr. Norton, this is no sudden fancy. Vera and I have always been a great deal to each other ever since the old days when your beautiful young wife made this house almost a second home to me."

Mr. Norton found his voice at last.

"Vera is her mother's image; but, Mr. Walden,

in the eyes of the world she is only the child of a ruined farmer. Can't you see the world would say you had made a *mésalliance*."

"I don't care for the world."

"And your mother would be terribly put out. Everyone hereabouts is saying she means you to marry the young lady staying at the Castle—Miss Melville."

"Only Miss Melville and I decidedly object. My mother will retire to her dower house on my marriage. She has, as you may be aware, an ample fortune of her own. I daresay I shall never see a penny of it, but I don't care for that, love means more than money in a man's life. If you will give your consent I shall speak to Vera to-morrow; should her answer be what I hope, we might be married early in the spring."

"You know the child has no fortune, her little money would seem nothing to you."

"I never thought she had a penny."

"She has five thousand pounds—I am afraid that explains Blake's persecutions of her. He talks a great deal about his money, but I have never seen any of it, and I daresay he thought Vera's five thousand would be a nice little addition."

CHAPTER V. AND LAST.

In the pretty drawing-room at the vicarage sat Vera and the young squire three days later. Noel Walden had been telling her of his love and her father's full and free consent to his wishes. Vera looked up at him with a strange new beauty in her lustrous eyes.

"Do you know they told me you were going to marry Miss Melville? I could hardly believe it, you seemed somehow always to have belonged to Mabel and me in the old days, while she went with the elders."

"I ask nothing better, dear, than to belong to you always; Vera, sweetheart, put your hand in mine and promise to be my wife."

"But—your mother?" asked Vera wistfully. "I met Lady Lucy once since she came back to the Castle and she would hardly speak to me."

The clasp of Noel's hand was almost a caress. "My poor mother is ambitious, Vera, she can't understand that love is more precious to me than gold. I am only a poor man, dear. I have very little to offer you, and we shall have to begin life very humbly for the Waldens of Castle Walden; but, Vera, we shall be happy, because we love each other."

Her head had dropped on to his shoulder, her sweet eyes could not meet his gaze, and Noel Walden knew he had won his cause.

"I am going home to-morrow," said Vera presently, when they came down to earth again. "That dreadful Mr. Blake has gone and father said he would come and fetch me himself."

"I wish you could stay here until you come to the Castle," said Noel earnestly. "I can't help feeling Mrs. Norton will be unkind to you."

He knew, though it had been carefully kept from Vera, that Blake, out of spite, had revealed his sister's plan. The cruel scheme, which would have given Vera to a life of misery just to gain a share of her money, was known now both to her father and her lover. Mr. Norton went about with a bowed head, as though he could never look his neighbours in the face again, so ashamed was he of his wife's conduct.

"You know," said Vera wistfully, "they will have to leave Whitehill. Father says he can't afford to keep on there after Michaelmas."

"He told me so. I have urged him to stay on and let the rent wait for better times; but I don't think I have succeeded. I tell him I can't fancy anyone but a Norton at Whitehill; but he seems bent on going."

Vera found her return to the farm quite as painful as she had expected. Mrs. Norton treated her with cold civility in her father's presence, and tormented her cruelly with her selfishness in his absence.

"It's fine to be you—going away to be a great lady and leaving your father to starve. There'll be a curse on you, Vera, mark my words, for your selfishness."

Poor Vera!

She grew so white and sad in those spring days that Mr. Norton was thankful he had consented to the young squire's wish for the wedding to be at Easter. Lady Lucy Walden had taken no notice of her son's fiancée. She had left the Castle and gone to live in London, until the repairs and decorations now in progress at the Dower House should be completed.

Ida Melville was with her, but before the heiress left Northshire she had gone down to the farm to see Vera.

"I want to tell you," she said frankly, "I never was so pleased to hear of any wedding as I was to hear of yours. Noel has the makings of a noble man, but his whole life would have been spoiled if he had made a loveless marriage. I know a great deal of the Waldens, Vera, and believe me, to them love is more important than gold."

She stayed an hour, and went away declaring she should come down to the wedding, and that she was sure they would be very happy.

The preparations for leaving Whitehill were going on apace. Now that the move was once resolved on, Mr. Norton seemed anxious to be gone, and his wife for once agreed with him, since she hated the idea of seeing Vera reigning at Walden Castle.

One of her boys, Horace, had been adopted by a cousin of his own father, and gone to a distant home in Wales; Albert was junior clerk in a Stoppleigh Bank, with every chance of getting on, so there would be only the three little girls to accompany their parents to the new home.

It wanted just a fortnight to Vera's wedding. She had gone to bed at the usual hour and slept soundly, for she was tired after a long primrose hunt in the woods with the children.

Towards morning she awoke to find the room filled with a thick smoke which almost choked her. She dressed herself hurriedly and went to call Joan, who slept in the next room, never thinking that the whole house was in flames, but so it was. As she opened her door the rush of smoke and heat almost blinded her.

There was no room for doubt, Whitehill farm was on fire and burning fiercely, while the family slept in their beds. To get upstairs seemed impossible; even the passage between her room and Joan's was a sheet of fire.

At last she thought of the bell which had been brought into her room during a recent illness. She seized it and rang it violently. A few moments and she heard her father's voice. His room was over hers, and by standing on the balcony outside her window it was possible to speak to him without risking suffocation from the smoke and heat.

"The stairs are in flames," said Mr. Norton brokenly. "Vera, do you think you could climb down to the garden by the supports of your balcony and ring the alarm bell?—it is our only chance."

Joan had joined her young mistress now, and was quick to act. Tearing one of the sheets into long strips, she knotted these together and fastening one end round Vera's waist she lowered her cautiously to the ground.

Five minutes more and the great bell that hung in the farm yard, and which was used to summon the labourers from the distant fields clanged out its alarm.

Vera was able now to look at the house, and saw that the fire must have originated inside, for though a heavy cloud of smoke darkened the air, there was no sign of the flames without.

The rooms on the first floor and the two flights of stairs were already impassable, but the old red brick front with its many creepers in their spring dresses showed no signs of the catastrophe.

Joan climbed cautiously down and joined her young lady; together the two dragged a tall ladder from the farm yard and planted it against Mr. Norton's window, but they were not strong enough to steady it, and it was an intense relief when a band of labourers came up and reported the fire engine was on its way.

(Continued on page 94.)

THE END OF HIS COURSE.

—20—

It was the brightest, cheeriest winter morning that could be imagined. The ground was well covered with clean snow, that sparkled radiantly in the sunshine. It was sharply cold, and a crust had formed upon the pavements that crackled and snapped musically beneath the firm impact of Cuthbert Ried's boot-heels.

His head was erect, his eyes bright, and the wine of life and the joy of living tingled through his being to his very finger-tips. He walked quickly, as a man intent upon some definite purpose, yet took time to look about him and to enjoy the fair prospect. Half way down the street he stopped before an unpretentious house, looked at the door-plate to make sure that he was right, and then sprang lightly up the steps.

Entering the hall, he was greeted cordially by a man more than twice his own age, whose dignified and courtly appearance betokened a gentleman of the old school, and whose surroundings proclaimed him a physician.

"Cuthbert Ried!" he exclaimed, with evident surprise. "I am glad to see you, although you are the last man that I expected this morning. I thought you were far away, studying the science of revolutions."

"And so I was ten days ago," responded Cuthbert; "but matters have grown rather dull down there, and—" he hesitated, laughing gently—"the fact is that I had an engagement here to fill, quite as important as any for the paper."

"I thought nothing was so important to a newspaper-man as his paper," said the other.

"There are not many things that can enter into the competition," said Ried, smiling frankly into his friend's eyes; "but this is exceptional. I have come home to be married."

Doctor Warner expressed his astonishment in a long-drawn whistle.

"You are a young man of many surprises, Ried," he said, "and, I may add, of infinite courage. I thought you were wedded to your profession, and now you talk of wedding a wife. What will you do with a wife, in all the half-civilized and out-of-the-way corners of the world that you have such a predilection for?"

"Perhaps I shall reform my wandering tendencies," said Cuthbert. "I have got an easy task for the winter, so I am to be married to-morrow to Nita Stanton, and start at once for the coast."

As the young man talked, the physician was watching him more closely than he had at first been doing. When Cuthbert entered the office he had been apparently bubbling with vitality. The keen air had given his cheeks a ruddy colour that had for a moment misled even the physician's practised eye. But now he noted a certain listlessness of manner, a suggestion of gauntness of visage; the glow had gone from his face, and in its stead had come a pallor that was hardly in keeping for a man who was talking about being married on the morrow, and starting upon a continental wedding-journey.

"That is not all you came to tell me?" he said.

"No," replied Cuthbert, hesitatingly, "I came to consult you as a physician and friend. You know I have been a rolling stone and haven't gathered much moss; that is, of the sort that is convertible into bank-stocks and real estate. And I thought I would like to fix things so that Nita would be comfortable if anything should happen to me."

"You are not thinking of marrying and dying all at once?" asked the physician, abruptly.

"No, of course not. But in my work a man may get bowled over without much warning."

"And so you want some life insurance as a provision against such a contingency?"

"Yes," assented Cuthbert, relieved to be thus helped to his conclusion. "I had always thought it rather a babyish thing to do. A man ought to be able to make provision within himself, by the use of his own brain and muscle. But I had never intended—I had never thought," he said,

flushing slightly, "that there would be anyone else. I might have made better use of my time."

"And you had never thought," said the physician, "that a man has some duties toward himself, even though there should be no others. I don't mean in the way of money-saving, but in the way of saving himself. A man's life is of infinitely more value than mere money, or than anything else."

He came towards the young man as he spoke, and laid his ear upon his chest. Then he listened for a moment.

"You have had a fatuous confidence in yourself," he resumed, presently. "Splendidly equipped by nature for the battle of life, you have abused every gift that she gave you. You have done the work of ten men. You have despised fatigue. You have laughed at danger, and have scorned disease. You have followed armies, and have been the first to tell the world of their slaughter—and your paper and not yourself has had the glory. You have penetrated the secrets of courts and of camps. You have seen some of the great moves upon the chessboard of the world, at short range. These things are worth the doing, I grant you," he said, as the young man's eye kindled and his cheek flushed, "if you do not pay too great a price."

"I have not paid too much," said Cuthbert, eagerly. "Perhaps I am a little below par just now; but the trip to the coast and the winter there, with Nita to look after me, will set me all right again. And next year—"

But the physician interrupted him, although he turned away and busied himself in another part of the room as he answered.

"Miss Stanton will not go with you, and the insurance is out of the question. You will not take the risk of leaving her unprotected; nor, if you are the man I think, will you take the risk of having children born to you and to her with an inheritance of disease."

As he finished he turned toward Cuthbert again, and a gleam of tenderness from his deep eyes tempered the brusqueness of his words.

Cuthbert gripped the arms of his chair with the nervous tension of a man bracing himself for a physical shock.

"You may be frank with me, sir," he said steadily. "I am not a coward."

"I know. If you were I should not care so much. You will not marry Miss Stanton. You may try the South if you wish, but it will not much matter."

"How long a lease have I?"

"If you are careful, live quietly and avoid all emotion, six months; possibly, with good luck, a year. If you are imprudent or should exert yourself violently—"

He made an expressive gesture in conclusion.

Cuthbert looked out from the low window thoughtfully.

"To-morrow was to have been my wedding-day," he said quietly. "I would have liked to finish my course; but it does not much matter."

"My dear boy," said the physician, laying his hand gently upon the other's shoulder, "our course is finished when Heaven says the word."

Cuthbert was deadly pale as he went out into the street, but it was not the pallor of fear. Yet the fresh wind blowing upon his face failed to again kindle the glow that had been there.

He was buried in thought, yet keenly conscious of every physical aspect of nature. For months he had been breathing the heavy, moisture-laden air of the tropics. This northern air, clear, dry and cold, had a sweet taste in his mouth. He liked the white glitter of the snow, and thought it made the world seem pure and clean. Sparrows were hopping about on the crust, and their shrill chirping was musical in his ears. The world had never seemed fairer, and the morrow was his wedding-day.

He laughed gently and mirthlessly at this. Of course, the world seemed fair to a bridegroom, always; and so why should it not to him? There never had been a sweeter bride than Nita Stanton would be. Even now her robes were ready, and he loved to think how her flower-like beauty would become them.

But was there ever a bridegroom who carried his death warrant to his wedding? To be sure,

his was not dated; but that was all it lacked. Six months, or may be a year; it did not matter much which, only the sooner the better. It would be tedious waiting. He wished it were to-morrow. Cuthbert Ried had faced death many times, but never like this. He had fought a duel once, and the memory of it came to him now, startlingly vivid.

The quarrel had been forced upon him; they fought with pistols; his opponent was a dead shot. Cuthbert remembered how long the time was that they stood there facing each other before the handkerchief fell. How clearly he could see it all. The bit of green sward fringed by the heavy woods. The surgeon at one side, kneeling, busy with his instruments. The seconds, eager, alert, one of them holding the handkerchief which he was to drop as the signal for firing. And his opponent in his white shirt, clean and crisp as the snow there, making such an excellent mark.

But Cuthbert did not intend to fire. He would let his opponent shoot, if he would, but as for himself, he had no taste for that sort of thing. But—how slow that man with the handkerchief was! This suspense was worse than the sting of a dozen bullets—worse than death itself.

At last the signal came. There was a puff of smoke, a sharp report, and Cuthbert felt the bullet scrape across his shoulder. Then he raised his pistol and fired in the air. It was all over in less time than I have taken to tell it. But it had seemed an age to him. And now he must live this over every hour, a dozen times an hour for six months, maybe for a year. The thought was unbearable.

And what should he say to Nita Stanton? How could he tell her that he must not entail disease upon the children who might be born to them?

It is said that in dreams we may cover vast spaces of time and distance, and have an infinitude of fancies in the briefest twinkling of a flying moment. Cuthbert had walked less than two squares, but there had been a long flight of fancies through his brain.

The street in which he was now beside a steep cliff that gave upon the river with a sheer fall of half a hundred feet. The streets that intersected terminated abruptly upon the face of the cliff. Coming to the second of these, Cuthbert was conscious of some unusual stir and excitement. People were running and pointing down the street and waving their hands wildly. As he came to the corner where he could look down the street, he saw a pair of horses dashing toward him at furious speed. In the sleigh was a single occupant, a little child with golden hair, whose baby hands were clutching futilely at the reins.

In a minute they would be up with him, in a moment more over the edge of the cliff and upon the rocks and ice below.

Ried was very calm, but again his mind was speeding faster than the steps of the flying horses.

The doctor had said that he must die. It would take six months or, maybe, a year. That was the worst of it. For he remembered how that fellow had been ages just dropping the handkerchief.

It was a fine thing to live and be strong. He felt his muscles growing tense with the desire to do battle with those horses.

He knew just what he should do. When the horses were a little nearer, he would run forward, seize the bits of the near horse and throw all his weight upon that side. This would cause them to swerve sharply about the corner of the street, and the carriage would overturn. Of course, the child would be thrown out; but that was better than to let them go on over the cliff. It was a good hundred feet to the edge, so there was no danger that the child would be thrown over where the carriage upset.

What splendid action the horses had! He wished they were not trammelled by the harness; they would move so much better.

If he should put himself in front of them, they would go straight on and carry him over the cliff. That would be better than to wait six months or a year, but it would not save the child.

He remembered a verse that he had read or heard somewhere: "Whoever would save his life must lose it."

The doctor had said that he must avoid any exertion. Perhaps this plan would do as well, then, as if he went over the cliff. It would take every atom of force that he could command, he well knew, to turn them around that corner.

He almost felt the hot breath from their nostrils. The people were shouting to him to keep out of the way. The little child appealed to him with wide and frightened eyes.

To-morrow was to have been his wedding-day. In six months, or may be twelve—he must die. Why not better to-day, now, this instant! Time goes so slowly when we are awaiting these crises in our lives.

Now he could see the wild light flashing from their eyes. Cuthbert gathered himself together, his muscles the tension of steel, and threw himself forward. There was a short, sharp struggle. The man's face shone with the fierce rage of battle. In a tangled mass they swerved about the corner. The carriage went upon its side, and the child rolled out unharmed, the centre of a bundle of furs and rugs. The near horse shook himself angrily to be rid of the encumbrance that hung so heavily upon the bits.

And then, as cheer after cheer went up from the people who had witnessed this deed of desperate daring, Cuthbert's grasp loosened, and he fell back, inert, while the red life-blood welled from his mouth, and made an ugly spot on the white snow.

"Heaven has said the word. His course is run," said the physician, bending tenderly above him. And as Nita Stanton bent, weeping, over the child who was saved, she said:

"My little sister he so loved that he gave his own life!"

But she never knew.

MY POOR BROTHER-IN-LAW.

—10—
CHAPTER VII.

A DANGEROUS POSITION.

"CONCUSSION of the brain; to be kept perfectly quiet for three whole days, and fed on a diet of slops!"

That was, in the concrete, the whole gist of Dr. Murray's instructions. He was surgeon to the Red Hussars—a small man with jet black hair and beard, and a wide experience of the world.

He looked at Mrs. Derrick; remembered some scraps of chaff in the regiment about her; guessed that she had something to do with Congreve's altered looks when he came back to Ireland, and promptly desired that the mutton-broth should be administered to the patient by Mrs. Purkiss, the housekeeper, and not by the mistress of the house.

This was at once a relief and a disappointment to Ida, but she obeyed the doctor's orders implicitly. The patient was to be kept from all noise and excitement, and her own common-sense told her that her visits to his room would have a most disturbing effect, so they were few and far between, as those of angels are said to be. His brother officers came over to see him, and as soon as the three days were over, seemed inclined to chaff him about his good luck.

"Never knew such a ripping situation!" exclaimed Major Godfrey. "I'd give a pony to be laid up with the lovely Mrs. Derrick to nurse me."

"I tell you that I'm in a deuce of a hurry to get out of it," rejoined Congreve with a frown of unmistakable pain. "I hate myself for being such a bother to everybody."

"Nonsense. The nursing of a hero is employment for a goddess."

"But I don't know that Mrs. Purkiss is a goddess, with a slight smile."

"Goddess! Good Heavens, no! She has a beard on her chin which many a youngster would give his eyes to have on his upper lip. But I could take my oath that gim-crack work-basket,"

pointing with his riding-crop to a pretty butter-basket, covered with bronze plush, with light-blue lining, "did not belong to that worthy female."

"Mrs. Derrick is very good," in a low voice, as he turned away his head. "When she thinks I've had enough of my own society she gives me some of hers. But no chaff, Major. I can't have it. She's a cut above that sort of thing, you know."

"All right," with a grin; "my advice to you is to get well as fast as you can then. Derrick Hall is the worst place in the county for a spooney fellow like you to be in. Now I," twisting his moustache, "would step into your shoes to-morrow, and not be a bit the worse. But ta-ta, old man. I wish you well out of the pleasantest position in the world," and with a good-humoured laugh, the Major shut the door behind him, and strode down the corridor.

Derrick Hall, with its stately rooms and long stone passages, struck Ida as the gloomiest hole in the world. Her own bedroom, with its antiquated furniture and panelled walls, made her think of ghosts, whilst the four-poster, with its crimson brocade curtains, and the roof, which was only a few feet from her head, induced dreams of suffocation.

The Professor, about this time, developed a sudden habit of hospitality. It was his way to take up a habit as he would a summer or winter coat, and keep it going for a few weeks; and now, after refusing to have a single soul to dinner in London, he seemed never content unless the grim old house was full of guests.

Ida, who had been thoroughly moped in Chester-street, was almost bewildered by the constant influx of visitors, but her spirits went up with a bound, and she felt as if she had been put on a sudden regimen of champagne.

Instead of silence, only interrupted by a grumble at luncheon and dinner, the officers and their wives, or sisters, as the case might be, kept up a conversation that never flagged. The old rafters rung with their merry laughter; the Professor regained his former cheerfulness, and Ida, admired by all, and adored by all the unmarried men, felt as if her vanishing youth had returned to her with new life and vigour, and was amazed at her own flights of wit and fun.

"Ida, just take this book to Congreve, I can't spare time to go and see him myself," said the Professor with an air of importance, "but you've nothing to do."

"I will send it to him at once."

"No, take it yourself. You have a new dress on, I believe, and I should like to hear what he thinks of it."

Her grey eyes opened to their widest extent for she had always thought that she might walk about in a blanket, without his noticing any difference between that and her ordinary garments. But all thought of her maroon cloth, with waistcoat, high collar and cuffs to match, in velvet of the same colour, went out of her head, as she entered Cecil Congreve's room.

There was a deep flush on her cheeks as she stood before him, and felt his grave eyes scanning her from head to foot. Her gown fitted her to perfection, and set off her delicate rounded figure to the best advantage, whilst the colour showed off the gold of her hair, and the purity of her soft white skin. What had come over her that she could not speak?

"You are looking well and happy," he said slowly.

The blood rushed to her heart, and the colour fled from her face.

"Yes, I am perfectly well, I don't fall off my horse and 'concus' my brain," she answered with an unsteady laugh. "And we are so gay, so fearfully gay now. We had charades the other night, and to-morrow we are going to dance and my husband hopes that you will be able to come in."

"To see you dance with every other fellow in the room?" an expression of disgust crossing his handsome face. "No thank you, I should be a thousand times better off where I am."

"But you will be so dull."

"Not if you will look in upon me in all your war-paint."

"Would you care?"

"It will give me something to exist on for the rest of the evening; you see I am thankful for crumbs. But tell me," pulling himself up morally with an effort, "how are you getting on? The Professor has had no attacks?"

"Not since we have been down here. But don't let us talk of them, it may bring bad luck," and she shivered.

He looked at her hard. "Has anything been happening in London?"

"Yes," bending her head and nervously arranging the little nothings on a small table, "but I won't tell you or anybody. He may get over it, and meantime I must bear it."

"Only promise that if you are in a difficulty you will send for me."

"It would have been of so much use when you were miles away in Ireland."

"But I'm close enough now," with a thrill of exultation, that he could scarcely keep out of his voice. "Send for me and I can be with you in no time."

"I don't see why I should bother you."

"If you don't see it, I can't help it," huffily.

"I know you were very good to him at Munich," in a low voice.

"Good!" he exclaimed with a catch in his breath. And then, after a pause which seemed endless, he said "Do you remember that picture of Rubens? I think the fiends had hold of me then, and were dragging me down with all their might."

"Ida, where are you?"

The querulous voice of the Professor broke the thread of dangerous reminiscence.

"There's a bothering woman in the drawing-room. Ponsonby, or something of the kind—and I can't entertain her."

"Lady Ponsonby is the great Panjandrum down here," said Congreve in a tired voice.

"No, no," testily from the Professor, who had a great idea of details, "the great Panjandrum belonged to the masculine gender."

"I will be sure and let you know if she has a little button at the top," and his wife laughed shakily with a wild attempt at gaiety, as she laid her hand compunctiously on his shoulder as she passed.

Congreve's eyes followed her to the door, and then went back to the poor shrunken figure of the man who was her husband. He had aged by many years since their last meeting; with his sunken chest and the grey streaks on his dark hair, he might have been sixty, instead of only a few years over forty. Congreve wished that he had never existed, but as he did exist, he could not help feeling a sort of compassion for him. He had the sweetest woman in England for a wife, but if he had not the taste to appreciate her, the blessing was lost upon him, and the happiness missed.

"I wanted to speak to you for a moment."

Congreve started, and the perspiration stood out on his forehead, for the smallest thing upset him in his weak state. Was he going to ask him to turn out?

The Professor went on as he drew his chair to the fire and nursed his knee;

"I've been talking to Dr. Murray, and I find out that you won't be fit to return to barracks for a fortnight."

"I'll go to-night, if you wish it," raising himself well up on his elbow.

Peter Derrick turned to look at him with a whimsical smile.

"I want you to promise not to leave the house before. I am going away, and I ask you as a favour to stay here till I come back."

"Impossible!" as the blood rushed to his face.

"There will be plenty of other people in the house. Godfrey and Mrs. Westmoreland, Mrs. Somebody else—I never can remember names—and a lot of others—but nobody I can trust as I do you."

Congreve murmured,—

"Don't, you mustn't trust me."

"You know my wife—you are an old friend—

she has confidence in you, and if anything goes wrong, the butler gets drunk, or the housekeeper impertinent, I should like her to have somebody to turn to."

"I—I don't think I can do it," shrinking from it all the more because the mere thought of it made his blood tingle.

"You can't help yourself," with the utmost composure, "and I know you will like it."

"And if I do, that isn't the only thing I have to think of," looking straight into the stern face of duty.

"Take my advice, and never look beyond. It's a queer world, and we've got to make the best of it. I like you to be here—so does Ida—so do you," and then, with a nod as if to show that he considered the matter settled, the infatuated man walked out of the room, satisfied that he had done a good stroke of business. He could get away—that was his principal object, and he thought that his wife would not say a word against it, if he provided her with somebody to take his place.

Congreve for one instant wished himself miles away; and the next, his pulses quickened as he recognised the fact that he had his doctor's orders to stay where he was. Such is the contradiction of nature, principle was against motive, and one motive against another. Cecil wanted to play the part of an honourable man, that is to say, his higher self did, whilst the lower gloried in the dangerous opportunities before him.

It seemed to him as if the devil were using him for a plaything. He was being pushed forward, when he meant to retreat, and friendship was used as a spurious plea to force him to stay where he was, when conscience proclaimed loudly that he ought to leave Derrick Hall at once.

Everything is generally made easy for people whose wishes take them to the downward path. There would be no difficulty he knew with his Colonel, for he had never applied for sick-leave before, being of an exceptionally healthy nature; and the world could scarcely lift up its voice against him if there were several married women to act as chaperones—and he would see Lady after day, feast on her beauty, watch every graceful movement, hear the soft, low voice that seemed better than any music to his ears, and feel that he was there as her confidant and champion, to give her advice or sympathy according to the chances of each day.

He could not sleep that night for thinking of it; and Dr. Murray could not understand why his temperature had gone up with a bound. He prescribed perfect rest for the remainder of the day, but when he arrived in the evening, prepared to distinguish himself among the dancers, he found his patient seated in a large arm-chair in a corner of the drawing room, with some of the prettiest girls in the house gathered round him.

Ida came across the polished floor to greet the doctor with her long white train trailing behind her. She had a bouquet of violets in her hand, and she half buried her face in them as she said in a low voice,—

"Captain Congreve has emerged from his hole. As my husband is going away to-morrow, and he has promised him to look after the safety of the house during his absence—so he thought —"

"That he would go over the bolts and bars to-night! A capital plan," Murray said with a smile. "We shall all envy him his position if he has the privilege of defending the mistress of the house from an attack of burglars."

"Is it true that Lady Ponsonby's place was attacked last night?"

"Quite true; but the rascals collared nothing. They made a grand sweep of her jewel-boxes, but fortunately for Lady Ponsonby, she had gone in grand 'fig' to the Rosemarys that night, and returned so late, that she told her maid to throw all her jewels into a drawer, and wait till the morning to replace them in their cases. So the boxes were no better than returned 'empties.'"

"What a joke! But it's rather alarming," "Would you like to have a troop of Hussars to defend you, or can we put up a wire between this and the barracks?" he asked, in pure chaff.

"A wire?" asked Major Godfrey, not knowing in the least what they were talking about. "Isn't the attraction strong enough already? We are always coming, but never going."

"You never outstay your welcome, Major Godfrey," with a gracious smile.

"If you give me a bit of encouragement, I'm sure to do it. I see that impostor Congreve is still hanging on," with an amused glance in the direction of his armchair. "Won't you give me leave to kick him out, Mrs. Derrick, and take his place?"

"Not unless you have a terrible accident in this very house."

"But I would gladly. 'Pon my honour, it would be too utterly delicious. I'd break every limb belonging to me. Which would be the most romantic—arm, leg, or collar-bone?"

"If you broke your collar-bone, you would be strapped up till you looked no better than a mummy. I know enough of 'ambulance' for that," she said, with a mischievous smile.

"Humph. Couldn't produce much effect as a mummy! I'll break an arm," with sudden resolution. "There is something so touching in a sling."

"Meanwhile, may I introduce you to Miss Martin for this waltz?" she asked, for she never forgot her duties as a hostess.

"You can dispose of me as you like, provided you promise me the next with yourself," he said, with a low bow.

Ida smiled her assent, as she moved away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROFESSOR TAKES NOTES.

A BAND of well-trained musicians discoursed sweet music from an old-fashioned gallery at one end of the large drawing-room, whilst at the other, three large windows down to the floor gave a view of the moonlit terrace, lawn, and shining river.

The intermediate space was half filled by a throng of dancers; bright eyes flashed in the light of many candles, swift feet flew over the polished floor—so long hidden by a large patterned Brussels carpet—every colour of the rainbow was seen in the fluttering gowns, and hearts bounded with happiness, and pulses quickened with new-born hopes, whilst the Professor looked on with dreamy eyes, and a soul that seemed far away from the giddy crowd.

"What an inane set of fools they look, twirling round like so many tea-totums," he said to Congreve with a sarcastic smile. "It's about as hard work as any convict has, and they call it pleasure!"

"I don't suppose it's many years since you danced, yourself, Mrs. Derrick," he rejoined, listlessly.

"Excuse me, I never danced but once, and that was in India. I trod on an adder that night, and I've ceased to remember it."

"Did it bite you?" with growing interest.

"It did, nasty brute."

"Did it do you any permanent harm?"

The Professor laughed a queer ghastly sort of laugh with no merriment in it, and walked away. Congreve was looking after him, with thoughtful eyes, when up came Dr. Murray, brimful of his last partner, who "took the cake," as he declared, in every sort of way.

"Never knew such an impressionable fellow," exclaimed Cecil with the air of a philosopher, "but, I say, just tell me if you ever knew of anybody who was bitten by an adder?"

"Scores of them when I was at Oota."

"But did any of them survive?"

"One," all the fun going out of his face.

"Did it affect his health for long after?"

"He died mad, with his throat cut," in a grave voice.

"Whew! I'm sorry to hear it."

"There are no adders under arm-chairs, or sofas, in Derrick Hall, I assure you."

"How did the madness first show itself?" with his thoughts on the Professor—and the Professor's wife.

"It's a plaguey disagreeable subject," exclaimed the doctor, irritably. "And I don't mean another fellow's poisoned brain to poison my enjoyment to-night."

"I am afraid the music and the noise must tire your head," Ida said, softly, as the doctor moved off.

She had scarcely spoken to him the whole evening, and he had felt sorely aggrieved. Now he looked up at her, and her beauty almost dazzled him.

Her hair was dressed high on her pretty little head like a golden crown; the pearls scarcely showed on the creamy whiteness of her neck, and every charm was enhanced by her lovely white dress, trimmed with exquisite lace, which fitted her figure like a glove made to order.

She was young and she felt it; she was beautiful, and she knew it, and her eyes shone like two stars. No wonder that Cecil felt ready to die for her.

A violet fell from her bouquet on to his coat-sleeve, but he had self-control enough to leave it there till he could capture it, and hide it away from every eye. He did not know, and he could not guess that the happiness of three lives depended on that tiny flower.

Ida only stayed by him for a few minutes, and then moved slowly across the room to talk to someone else. His eyes followed her where ever she went, but he had kept himself completely in hand whilst she was with him, and he resolved to do so with the firmest resolution during her husband's absence, so long as he was left there as it were on parole.

But it was hard—desperately hard—and he knew that it would have been better for him to be thousands of miles away—as far apart as "the Moth and the Star."

His heart was full of feverish, passionate longing, but his face was deathly pale, as furtively he picked up the violet, and pressed it to his burning lips, telling himself at the same time,—

"I could be content, if I knew that my darling was happy!"

The Professor was half-hidden by the curtain of one of the large windows, but he could see all that was going on. He saw Congreve pick up the flower his wife had dropped, he saw the kiss and the longing look, and in an instant the truth was revealed to him.

A fierce flame of jealousy leapt to life in the heart which had seemed so long nothing better than an extinct volcano. He stood still as any piece of furniture, whilst a revolution was going on in his ways of thought and feeling.

He was like a mummy into whose embalmed body some conjuror had infused a second life. The blood coursed fast through his usually sluggish veins, the eyes, always so dull and dreamy, flamed like two torches. A wild burst of passion broke over him, and shook him from head to foot. This man whom he had trusted—this man whom he had called his friend—he had been cheating him behind his back; laughing in his sleeve when asked to take care of the house, counting on the rare opportunities he would have during his absence, robbing him of the one inalienable possession which was his by the laws of God and man!

Oh to pay him out—to have a complete revenge. He put his hand to his head, and fiendish thoughts crowded one after the other through the seething whirlpool of his brain. He felt a pantherish desire to seize him by the throat, as he sat there at his ease with that look on his face that women loved—the hero who had saved a child's life—and yet would stoop to damn a woman's soul!

To kill would be but a poor revenge after all, for he was not the sort of man to be afraid of death. To rob him of his good name—that would be the refinement of torture; to stain his honour—the honour which he pretended to hold unsold before the world—that would be the right payment for such treachery as his. But how to do it? That was the difficulty. His brother officers would laugh in his face if he insinuated that Congreve was a coward, for they had a record to look back upon, with which they were so much better acquainted than he

Congreve, quite unconscious of the fiend that he had roused in his host's breast, was being smiled upon at the moment by pretty Miss Gilbert. She was showing him the diamond in her bangle which he said was the finest he had ever seen. She told him that her father had brought it from India, and there was a legend about it that it was fated to bring sorrow on all who touched it.

"I defy it to influence me in any evil way," Cecil assured her, "after it has rested on Miss Gilbert's arm."

He examined it closely, and only gave it back to her when Major Godfrey came to elicit her.

"You won't leave it in pledge till you come back?"

"No, I feel as if it were part of myself," and she gave him a look over her shoulder as she was going away.

"I hope you keep it in a safe place."

"Yes, in a little dressing-case, the key of which is always on my châtelaine."

"There, now, Congreve, we shall know where to find it," laughed Major Godfrey as he marched off.

"Miss Gilbert's isn't half as good as mine," remarked Mrs. Westmoreland, the Colonel's wife, in an irritable tone, as she unlatched a brooch which was half hidden among the folds of her ample bodice. "That was brought me from a fat little Rajah whose life my husband saved. There is some curse about him, too, and a story which I've forgotten, but I tell every maid that comes to me, that it brings death to all who steal it."

"Do you think Peace would have been stopped by the fear of an Indian's curse?"

"I don't know; but I've kept it for fifteen years, and I hope to be able to leave it either to my son's wife, if he has one, or to my daughter when I die."

"More likely to be found one morning with your throat cut! and the diamond gone," grumbled the Colonel, a good-looking man with sad eyes. "My wife will always sleep with the thing under her pillow, which I call an invitation to murder."

"I hope Mrs. Westmoreland has consented to stay here for several days longer," put in the Professor, suddenly.

Congreve turned uneasily at the sound of his voice, which came from directly behind his chair.

"I shall be delighted," with a pleasant smile, for she liked her present quarters, "but the Colonel says, duty calls him."

"But he will leave you behind?" the Professor continued, without waiting to express the slightest regret.

"Yes, with pleasure; to be the chaperon of the party."

"Pity a poor soldier tied to his post!" said the Colonel with the air of a martyr, though to tell the truth he rather enjoyed a small spell of bachelorhood without his fidgety wife. "But I say, Congreve, it is high time for you to go to roost. You don't look up to much."

It was perfectly true, for Cecil Congreve at the moment was looking up to nothing at all. The noise and excitement after the quietude of his sick-room, made his head throb as if it would burst, and there were such deep shadows under his eyes that they might have been laid on with a painter's brush.

He stood up, and was immediately surrounded by a bevy of girls who had come to bid him good-night, with saucy suggestions as to his dreams, or extraordinary propositions for the morrow. Major Godfrey drew his arm through his and led him to the door. He only nodded goodnight to Ida, but, unluckily, even those two words spoken in her soft voice, sent the blood with a rush to his pale face, and Peter Derrick saw it. He said nothing, but he opened and shut the fingers of his right hand with a convulsive gesture, as if he had got a noxious insect in his grasp, and meant to crush out its life.

"Good-night and good-bye, Mr. Derrick," Cecil said, courteously. "I expect you will be off long before I make my appearance."

"We shall not meet again for some time. I hope you will survive the affliction," he answered in a tone of dry sarcasm.

And so they parted, scarcely guessing; where or how the meeting would take place; but Major Godfrey exclaimed as soon as they were alone in the hall—

"What the deuce have you been up to, old man? The Professor looked about as amiable as a Sepoy when he is spitting a man on his sword."

CHAPTER IX.

A MESSAGE TO THE POLICE.

THE Professor never did anything like other people. Instead of ordering either the dog-cart or the brougham at a certain hour to convey him to the station, and taking a general farewell of his guests at the front door, he sent on his baggage "to be left till called for," said he would follow it on foot in time for the 1250 to London, and only bade good-bye to his wife in the privacy of her bedroom.

When the gong had sounded they all collected in the dining room with excellent appetites for luncheon; the Professor's empty chair proclaimed that he had departed on his travels; but nobody's spirits suffered in consequence. Even Ida felt exhilarated by the knowledge that he was out of the house, and she need no longer watch him to see if one of his queer attacks were coming on. If she had loved him, she would have been still more anxious about him for the very reason that she could not watch over him; but during those last few months they had drifted hopelessly apart, and his absence was felt as nothing but a relief.

Congreve came out of his hole again, and was much pelted; but Ida kept strictly to the line she had marked out for herself, and took care never to be left with him. Still the day passed happily enough. If the men went out shooting, the women joined them at luncheon, bringing the invalid with them "for change of air" as they said.

If the men shot badly in the afternoon, they put it down to the fact that laughter upsets the nerves; and conjured the girls not to be so terribly witty the next time. Miss Gilbert was very late for dinner on the day but one after the Professor's departure, and when she came down there was rather a scared look in her eyes.

"So sorry, dear Mrs. Derrick," she said, hurriedly, with an apologetic glance round the room, "but I could not find my gold bangle, and that delayed me!"

"I hope you did not drop it in the furze," said Ida, anxiously. "If you like, I will send one of the keepers at once to look for it."

"Oh no—I never wear it out of doors—my one solitary diamond is too utterly precious."

"Oh then you can't have lost it?" in a tone of relief. "We must help you look for it after dinner. Captain Congreve, will you take Miss Gilbert?"

"I think Miss Gilbert had better take Captain Congreve," she answered with a laugh. "I look rather the most capable of the two."

"Don't jeer at the unfortunate, Miss Gilbert."

"I say, Congreve, looks rather bad for you," called out Major Godfrey, who was just on in front. "He took jolly good care to ask where you kept it, don't you remember, Miss Gilbert?"

"Ah, so he did. Perhaps if I treat him well, he will hand it back."

"You are sure you put it into your dressing-case?" Cecil asked, as he drew out her chair.

"Don't you think you are disposed to take it for granted, as it was such a constant habit?"

"No, I know I'm not mistaken, for I locked up my dressing-case without putting away my earrings and brooches, and when I opened it again, there was the bangle at the top, and I thought it wanted rubbing up."

"Then you took it out again?"

"No, I was so deadly sleepy, I wouldn't bother myself about anything."

"And where did you put your châtelaine?"

"On the toilet-table, where it always lies when I'm not wearing it."

"And nothing else has gone?"

"Nothing; but that I prized more than all the rest," she said, with tears in her eyes.

"Cheer up, Miss Gilbert, I'm certain it will turn up," he said kindly. "A thief, you know, would be sure to have walked off with the whole kit."

And then he led the conversation into a different channel, and began to talk of the theatrical company which had taken the Theatre Royal at the neighbouring town of Branfield.

"A capital company, I believe. It isn't often we get the chance of seeing Shakespeare's plays done decently anywhere out of London," the Major remarked to his hostess.

"Let us go, by all means," rejoined Ida eagerly.

"Can you tell me what is on to-morrow?"

"Othello," the pick of the whole lot. They say that the whole audience shivers in the scene with the pillow; one old lady went into hysterics; and one highly strung female vowed she would divorce her husband because he had dark hair, and rather a Moorish complexion."

"How absurd! But the acting must be very realistic. I should like to be drawn completely out of myself," Ida said, with a sigh. "It would be so delicious for half-an-hour!"

Involuntarily Congreve's eyes sought hers in ready sympathy, but he looked quickly away.

"I wouldn't if I were you. Somebody else would be sure to take advantage of such a glorious opportunity for getting into a more charming form than her own. What a chance for the plate and tory."

"Major Godfrey, can't you be serious for a moment?"

"Yes, perfectly tragic when I'm opening a bill. Shall I get the tickets for you? Glad to make myself useful," he said, with an affectation of humility.

All caught eagerly at the proposition. One might have thought they were a set of country-bumpkins, who had never had a chance of going to a theatre before, in the course of their monotonous lives.

For a time, even Miss Gilbert's loss was forgotten in a warm discussion about their favourite actors. But as soon as the ladies rose from the table, Ida and a few others went up-stairs to begin an exhaustive search.

They looked under mats and carpets, under the toilet-table and sofa, in the crevices of the sofa, in the pockets of her dresses, in fact in every likely or unlikely place. There was the key on the châtelaine; there was the dressing-case apparently untouched. The bangle was the only thing that had gone from the room.

"I can't understand it," said poor Rose Gilbert, in a deplorable tone of voice, as she sat down on the sofa with her elbows on her knees, and her chin in her hands. "The horrible thing is that it must have been taken when I was actually in the room, for I put it away when I came to bed, and I wore my châtelaine the whole day, so no one could have got at the key."

"But that is impossible! No one could come into your room without waking you up," said Ida, confidently.

"Last night I slept like a top. When I was called I couldn't believe that it was time to get up, and I fell asleep again directly; you remember I was late for breakfast, and Major Godfrey pretended that all the kedgeroe was eaten up."

"Yes, and you only looked half awake then. Oh, my poor dear thing, I am so sorry for you," and Ida put her arms round the girl, and kissed her affectionately. "I tell you what, I will send a message to the police-station at once."

"But there will be such a fuss, and I shall never get it back," and the poor girl began to cry.

"Nonsense, dear, it shall be got back. I feel as if it were a disgrace to the house," and her large eyes flashed angrily.

Now there was one man in the Red Hussars who hated Congreve, partly because he was superior to him in personal beauty and physical capacity, in popularity, in position, in fact, in every way, and principally because Rose Gilbert liked him better than himself.

His name was James Paulett, which sounded well enough, but his father was a tradesman, with a good head for accounts, and an acute interest in details, which made him succeed so



IDA CROSSED THE POLISHED FLOOR TO GREET THE DOCTOR; A BOUQUET OF VIOLETS IN HER HAND.

well in the wholesale line, that his son rose like a Phoenix from the fire, and out of the proceeds of tallow developed into a self-styled gentleman.

Whilst Cecil Congreve belonged to such an ancient family that a peerage would have brought no accession to his dignity, and he bore the stamp of good birth, not only on his features, but on his bearing, and in the very tone of his voice.

"I am glad I didn't show such precious curiosity about that diamond, as Congreve did," Paulett remarked to Clara Melville, a girl who had done her best to capture Cecil's heart, and felt sore because she had failed. "Why should he bother himself as to where she kept it? She might have put it in a coal-scuttle for all I cared."

"Yes, but Captain Congreve has a way of interesting himself about everything and everybody," she said, with a dash of spite. "I told him I was going to London, the other day, so he immediately asked if I were going to travel alone. Just as if I wanted his escort, indeed!"

Captain Paulett smiled, for he suspected that she would only have been too glad to have it, if he had dreamt of offering it.

"He thinks no end of himself, that's certain; and I always notice," he added, complacently, "that fellows who put such a premium on themselves, run down to a deficit before the end."

"Pride must have a fall," said Miss Melville, maliciously, as her eyes followed Cecil Congreve steering his way to an arm-chair at a safe distance.

A few minutes later he looked up, and seeing Miss Gilbert and the rest returning from their unavailing search, inquired with the greatest interest if they had chanced to be successful.

Captain Paulett watched him cynically. Evidently his sympathy was some consolation to Rose Gilbert, for she smiled as she looked up into his good-looking face, and made the most effective use of her blue eyes, which he chose to consider another offence on Congreve's part, with a lover's usual sense of fairness!

There was a little dancing, after which Major Godfrey went round the house as Congreve's deputy to see that all the bolts and bars were fastened.

The ladies vowed that they should lock their bedroom doors just as if they were in a hotel, and Rose Gilbert told Cecil to be sure and do the same, as he would not have much chance with a burglar.

"Not I, Miss Gilbert," he said decidedly. "I fancy a burglar would find me a pretty rough customer still, and I'd promise to make noise enough to rouse the house."

"Please don't talk so much about it, or you will shake my nerves, though the Colonel swears they are made of iron," said Mrs. Westmoreland, with her jolly laugh. "Now girls be off, or you won't get to sleep till the burglars come. I wonder if that is my glass of lemonade?" looking at one on the hall-table. "I believe it is, and that my maid has forgotten it."

"It must be, for no one else drinks it at night," Ida said, as she took it in her hand. "Let me carry it up for you."

"My dear Mrs. Derrick, let me—" and the irrepressible Major whisked it away from her, and up the stairs before she could stop him. "Mind you pledge the burglar when he comes after your brooch," he said, as he handed it to its rightful owner.

"Now, do hold your tongue, you troublesome man," Mrs. Westmoreland said reproachfully. "You won't be content till you've given us all the nightmare."

Just then, there was a ring at the front-door, and the women looked as scared as if they thought it was an army of burglars coming in to take possession of the whole house.

It proved to be a Mr. Jones from the police-station, who requested Mrs. Derrick to give him all particulars concerning the lost property, and the characters and names of her servants, &c.

Congreve came out of his room to assist at the interview in the library, and Mrs. Purkiss was fetched from up-stairs.

The constable admitted that the evidence pointed to some one in the house, probably a domestic-servant, as the thief, and regretted that he had not been sent for as soon as the bangle was missed, for no doubt it had been passed by this time to someone outside. If Mrs. Derrick felt at all nervous, he would leave one of his men behind him.

Ida looked at Cecil, and as he nodded his approval, accepted the suggestion gratefully. And then they all separated.

A policeman took up his position in the inner-hall, and Mrs. Purkiss took care to see that he was provided with a jug of beer, and some bread and cheese to support him during the watches of the night.

Congreve went back to his room feeling uneasy and disturbed in mind. It was so provoking that such a thing as this should have happened directly the Professor's back was turned, when Mrs. Purkiss declared that no robbery had ever taken place in Derrick Hall before,—"not as long as she had known it, and that was ever since she had turned sixteen."

As he was walking down the corridor which led to his room, he thought he heard footsteps close to him. He looked round expecting to see the policeman making his rounds, but he was astonished to find that the passage was empty from one end to the other.

"What a duffer I am!" he exclaimed, impatient at his own stupidity. "Of course it was the echo of my own. I'm getting as nervous as any old woman!"

Nevertheless he stood still at the door of his room, and listened again intently. Not a sound was to be heard. Contrary to their wont, the men had not lingered long either in the billiard or smoking-room. Tired with their exertions during the day they had all gone quietly to bed; and it is probable that by half-past twelve there was only one person awake in the house—and that was not the policeman!

(To be continued.)



"VANGIE—REVENGE! REVENGE IS SWEET; MY TIME HAS COME AT LAST," SAID JASPER SAVAGELY.

EVANGELINE'S LEGACY.

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CHAPTER XLII.

THE VOW OF JASPER BROOKE.

MUCH may happen in a single year. A great deal may happen in three. From Marley Mills proper the Hubbles have long since disappeared; and the smart large house and business have passed into other hands. A similar fate, soon after the Hubbles' departure from the neighbourhood, befell the Lower Mills upon the other side of the water. Yes; the Herculasties have likewise vanished; and the Lower Mills, too, are in the hands of strangers—so that the pleasant old homestead there never, after all, became the home of Mark and Lina.

The Hubble family elected to pitch their tent at Brighton, where they bought as big a house as they could find vacant in a fashionable quarter, and there in it they now dwell in great splendour. But, strange to record, both Amelia and Sophy are yet unmarried; though it is certainly through no fault of their own, or of their mother's either, says malicious rumour, that they are Amelia and Sophy Hubble still.

The long reckoned-on baronet, it would seem, the dream of Mrs. Hubble's life, is a long time turning up; but the worthy woman has not yet begun to despair—though Amelia is growing positively stout, and Sophy's bloom is fading.

Strangers, also, dwell at Moss-court Priory; and its old master and his evil-doing are there alike forgotten. Wonders in the way of restoration have been done for the old mansion. The park and grounds are now in perfect order; the sloping lawns in the summer-time are dazzling with the newest horticultural designs in "bedding out." Brambles and weeds are no longer known there; and gold-fish swim in the clear green water of the moat.

No one would recognise in the Moss-court Priory of to-day the gloomy, crime-haunted old barrack of a few years ago.

The tenant of the place is a stock-broker, who goes up to town every morning. He would be glad, at any price, to purchase the Priory for his own; so charming is its situation, he considers, on the banks of the beautiful Wane. But the owner of Moss-court—Mrs. Mark Herculastle—cannot part with the house even if she would; the property being strictly tied to the Wroughton family.

Mr. and Mrs. Mark Herculastle themselves live at Goole Grange, near to Burcot, in Midlandshire; and a beautiful home is theirs. The house is really new, but it has not a new appearance. It is a home in every sense of the word, as Lina Ferris, before her marriage, had declared to her lover that it should be. And as he was her lover in those days, so is he her lover still.

Sweetness and light, conjoined with every earthly comfort, reign now at Goole Grange. Given these blessings, seasoned with mutual love, life there is necessarily one of perfect, unclouded peace.

When Mark Herculastle married and settled down at Burcot as a hard-working and conscientious country squire, his sister Helen went to live in London with "Aunt Lucy"—as they all now called her—at Lina's house in Portugal-square. From the very hour that Mrs. Maclean was introduced to Helen Herculastle, she had conceived a great affection for Mark's sister. The attraction was reciprocal; and the two eventually became dear friends.

Therefore when Mrs. Maclean, on Mark's wedding-day, said helplessly to Helen after church—the quiet wedding had been solemnised in London—

"What I shall do in this great house all by myself, my dear, I can't for the life of me imagine. Now that I have lost Lina, I shall indeed be lonely. How I wish—how heartily I wish, Helen, that you would stay with me here, and make up your mind to live in Portugal-square!"—when Mrs. Maclean said this, Helen had answered eagerly:

"Do you really mean it?"

"I shouldn't say so, my dear, if I did not," returned Aunt Lucy earnestly. "I never have been used to living alone—in fact, I couldn't do it. So if you won't take pity on me, Helen, I shall advertise for a companion; and oh, dear! I shan't like that, I'm sure."

"Then I will stay here with pleasure," Helen answered in grateful accents. "You have solved for me a rather troublesome riddle, Aunt Lucy."

It had been the sincere desire of Mark and of Lina that Helen should live with them at Goole Grange. But Helen Herculastle was by far too sensible a woman to acquiesce in any such domestic arrangement, and said frankly that she preferred to cast in her lot with that of Mrs. Maclean; knowing that to do so would be the more prudent course in the end.

Helen, in these days, is not quite the Helen Herculastle of some three or four years ago. Her clear, true eyes have in them a sort of settled sadness; her abundant hair, when she lets it all down about her shoulders, reveals here and there an unmistakable silver thread. Notwithstanding, her laugh is as kind and as pleasant as of yore—when she does laugh; and the world around her at any rate does not suspect how sore and how full her heart is at times.

There are moments, it is true, when her sorrow finds its voice; but they are moments when it and she are alone with each other, and no mortal eye can see them.

More than one excellent offer of marriage has Helen Herculastle received since she has lived with Mrs. Maclean in Portugal-square; but her wooers have been dismissed kindly but firmly—she had no love to bestow upon any of them, and in her frank way she told them so.

She is true to the memory of a dream, as it were. She knows not whether Guy Arminger be dead or alive.

Never once has she beheld him since the day on which they parted at Moss-court Priory; it is but a few brief years ago, but to Helen it seems like a century.

At first his letters used to come, if not "every

day," at any rate regularly enough to satisfy her. Then by degrees their advent became less frequent; gradually less frequent still; until at last they ceased to come at all. It was over!

So the dream ended, as such dreams alas! do often end, when the man to whom a loving woman pins her faith is a man like Guy Arminger—"unstable as water."

No. Helen knew not whether he were living or dead; at home or abroad. One thing, however, she did know; and that was that, cruelly as she had suffered through loving him too well, she nevertheless loved him still.

Three persons, and three only, knew Helen's story—Mark, Lina, and Mrs. Maclean. But the name of Guy Arminger was never named among them.

One bright morning, in early autumn, the letter-bag as usual was brought to Goose Grange. It arrived, however, a little later than common; and when Mark unlocked it he and Lina had nearly finished breakfast. He looked grave as he took out the letters and papers.

"My dear," he said to his wife, "here is another for you from Dr. Bell. I believe I am afraid it contains bad news, another letter following so quickly on the one of yesterday morning."

Lina turned a shade paler than the "warm paleness" which was her natural complexion; and her hand trembled visibly as she broke open the envelope. Upon its raised dark-blue seal the word "Asylum" stood out distinctly in letters of white.

There were only a few lines, which Lina read at a glance.

"It is not from Dr. Bell; it—it is from the chaplain himself, Mark," she said, the tears starting to her eyes. "My grandfather is dying. If we wish to see him alive we must start at once."

They rose immediately from the table.

"My dear one," said Herculane quietly, "I am ready to start with you now."

In the old tender fashion she put up her arms to his brown neck and drew down his head to a level with her own. She kissed him for thanks and hurriedly left the room. Mark pulled out his watch. They could catch with ease the ten o'clock express if they drove direct to Beaumont station.

Twenty minutes later husband and wife were ready for the journey; Mark standing in the hall of the Grange and drawing on a pair of driving-gloves; Lina, richly but very neatly attired and wearing a veil, descending the handsome staircase.

"One moment, dear," she said to her husband. "I must see Phil before I go."

She spoke to the servant who was clearing away the breakfast things. He bowed and disappeared.

Soon down the staircase there came a broad and blooming damsel, bearing in her ruddy arms a cowering youngster, sweet and fresh as a daisy from his morning bath. Whilst all in a flutter at the stair-head, had suddenly appeared a gaunt old female, in stiff white cap and apron, screaming out angrily,—

"Take care, Jane gal, or you'll drop him! You'd no business to ketch him up, all of a whirl like that w'out my leave. Davy told me you nearly let him fall the other day, you careless lussy, you!"

The tall old woman was none other than Martha Crocket; the girl was Jane, a young woman grown now, who was shortly to be married to one of Mark's groomsmen, and whose daily spirits were wild and ungovernable in consequence; and the child was Lina's first-born and Mark's heir, to whom they had given the name of Philip.

Phil was a splendid little chap, nearly two years old, and the picture of lusty health. He had his mother's soft dark hair and beautiful eyes. Before she went down the hall steps, she smothered the child's plump sweet neck with kisses, and strained him to her bosom in a passion of love. Over his mother's shoulder meanwhile the small rascal grabbed playfully at Mark's nose.

Herculane's own dog-cart and thorough-bred chestnut were waiting at the door; and Jane's smart-looking young man was standing at the horse's head.

"It will be better—quicker than the carriage," Herculane said; and Lina answered, "you know best, Mark."

The next minute she was seated by his side, and they were off; past the meadow and down the park, with Jane's young man, rigid with folded arms and cockade, perched aloft behind them.

The asylum in which Jasper Brooke was confined was not far from London; and soon after one o'clock in the noon of that day Lina and Mark had arrived at their destination.

They had telegraphed from Beaumont in answer to the letter; so that the governor and the chaplain were in readiness to receive them and to conduct them straightway to the old man's room.

"Are we in time?" was Lina's first question. Yes, they were gravely assured; they were not too late.

Down cold stone passages, along vast corridors with many strong doors on either side, they were courteously yet silently ushered, until they reached the apartment wherein the old lock-keeper lay dying.

On their way, thicker more than one dull, sickening thud, more than one frightful shriek and blood-curdling yell, had assailed their ears in spite of stout walls and doors.

But the sounds were not wholly new to Lina; she and Mark had visited the asylum on many a previous occasion; and as she had always had his dear arm to cling to throughout the ordeal, she had never been afraid.

The room to which they were conducted was a familiar one. At the door of it the governor and the chaplain withdrew—the latter observing reassuringly, that he was close by if wanted.

Lina and Mark entered together.

Everything there was scrupulously neat and clean; and the heavily-barred window was open to let in the air. Comfortable armchairs had been wheeled to the bedside; and fruit, flowers, jelly, and champagne were upon a table conveniently near.

Evidently Jasper Brooke had been supplied with every luxury, had been allowed to want for nothing that money could procure.

A doctor was bending over the old man's pillow, and smoothing back with kindly touch from his forehead the long damp locks of snow-white hair.

Doctor Bell straightened himself as Lina softly approached, and said:

"Ah, I am glad to see you, Mrs. Herculane—very glad! He has uttered your name repeatedly within the last half-hour."

"He is harmless to-day, doctor, I hope?" said Mark, in a low, anxious undertone, as he shook hands with Doctor Bell.

"Oh, my dear sir, penny have no fear!" replied the madhouse doctor, in a cheery whisper—"pray have no fear on that score. He has not the strength of a child to-day—please take my word for it. Half an hour will about end it. A happy release, my dear sir—a truly happy release."

So said smug Doctor Bell, and went on chatting in a whisper about Jasper. He was perfectly acquainted, of course, with the lock-keeper's case; and so used was he in his calling to horrors and deathbed scenes of all kinds, that the day for him was long since gone by when a dislocation so mild as that of the poor maniac before him could in the slightest degree ruffle his professional equanimity.

Lina meanwhile had sunk upon her knees by the pillows, and had raised very gently the old man's head to her arm. It rested heavily upon it.

"Grandfather," she said, controlling her voice as well as she could—"grandfather dear, you remember me to-day, do you not? I—I am never going to leave you any more—never again, grandfather, never again!"

He rolled his dimwitted gaze upon her, and a ray of light, for the first time for many months, seemed to strike athwart his clouded brain. The dimming eyes lit up with a gleam of unspeakable love. Lina saw it, and was thankful.

She prayed fervently that he might recognise her, if only for a moment, before those poor restless eyes were shut for ever—to gaze upon her in this world never again.

Doctor Bell, too, had noticed that sudden gleam in the eyes of the maniac; and he stopped in his blithe whispered chat with Mark, to say quietly,—

"Humour him, Mrs. Herculane—humour him in whatever he says or fancies. Pray take my word for it, it is the wiser way."

She looked up pitiously, and nodded acquiescence.

"Yes, I remember you—why haven't you come before, my Vangie, my beautiful Evangelist?" the old man was saying. He put out his quivering hand and laid it upon her hair; caressed with infinitely tender touch its soft dark waves. "My child, my one ewe-lamb, why haven't you come sooner to your poor old father? Why have you left him so lonely all these long, long years! . . . Mark, Vangie! A barge is coming down stream. Look—look—look!" he shouted with all his strength, half lifting himself in his bed. "Vangie, we will go and wind back the great gates together, dear—you and I—as we used to wind 'em back in the dear old days."

Doctor Bell had quitted Herculane, and went nimbly round to the bedside. Could it be, he wondered, that he was wrong, after all, in his reckoning, and that the old man's exit would not be of so mild a character as he—Doctor Bell—had anticipated? The patient's voice was stronger than it had been for weeks.

Lina could hardly speak. She understood now that it was her mother, and not herself, that Jasper believed had at last come back to him.

"They told me—they told me—you were dead!" he rambled on more feebly. "Yes, Vangie, and—and they showed me your grave in London—"

"Grandfather, it was a lying grave; for years the name upon that grave was a lie," she tried to tell him. "It has been altered—it is made right and truthful now—"

But Jasper could not understand. He did not heed her.

"I was at your funeral, child—it was many years ago; but I remember now," he said. "And yet—and yet, how is it? You have come back to me. . . . And your lover, where is he? . . . your false lover . . . where? Ah!" yelled the old man, "I know, I recollect—that night on the bridge—you were with him there in the twilight—I saw you, I heard you—"

In a brief access of nervous power he sprang this time right up; his eyes gleaming dangerously; his breath coming fast. There was foam upon his lips and upon his ragged beard. With one bony hand he gripped Lina's wrist; the other clenched and pained fist he raised high in air, as if in the act to strike some spectre shape before him. "Mark!" cried Lina, faintly.

He was with her almost before she had spoken; and quietly loosening the madman's clutch, he freed his trembling wife and drew her safely upward to his side.

"Do you know?" said the old lock-keeper huskily, "how I found out—found out that Sir Philip Wroughton was the man who took away my child! . . . After all those years of weary waiting and watching for him—all those years in which, all the while, we had been close to each other—the villain! . . . do you know?" he asked in a kind of hissing whisper, leaning aside towards Lina as he put the feverish question—"how I found out?"

Clinging to Mark with her left hand, she drew quite close to the bed again; and, bending over her grandfather, she wiped with her handkerchief the gathering froth from his lips and beard.

"No, father," she said, soothingly. "I do not know—I never have known. How did you find out, father?"

Doctor Bell, who, opposite to her, had furtively possessed himself of the arm which the madman had raised menacingly above his head, nodded approval across to Lina at the mode of address she had so compassionately employed.

"That is right"—his lips formed the words in silence—"call him 'father.'"

"You were on the bridge with him, Vangie,

late one summer evening—do you recollect!—close to the shallows near the weir where the trout lay. . . . Child, do you remember—it was the Marley Race-week?”

“Father, I remember,” she said, battling with her emotion.

Mark stood with her, listening, his arm encircling her waist.

“You were with him on the bridge that night, Vangie,” went on the old man fiercely. “I was beneath it with my lines, in the shallows near the weir: I heard your two voices, yours and his; sometimes the roar of the water drowned them . . . sometimes they came to me loud and clear . . . Vangie, Vangie, on that night I learned for the first time that—that Sir Philip was the man—that Sir Philip Wroughton of Mosecourt was the man who took Vangie Brooke from her home! . . . Vangie Brooke—Evangeline—I heard the dear name splash up in the laughing waters of the weir!”

Scarcely conscious of what she did or uttered, she broke from Mark's restraining arm and dropped again upon her knees by the bed. Vividly then came back to her the memory of that night, when she had stood with Sir Philip upon the wooden bridge, and had heard, with a spasm of almost agonised terror, the eerie voice in the weir. “Ah, she understood now!”

“Grandfather,” cried Evangeline Hencastle, “she was a lawfully-wedded wife—she was in truth Evangeline Wroughton. Believe that, and die happy! It is indeed the truth—the solemn truth! I am her child.”

Part only of the meaning of her passionately-spoken words pierced the shadowed brain of the dying lock-keeper.

“So he said . . . so he said on that night—I heard him,” he panted savagely; “but I did not believe him, Vangie—it was a lie—the Wroughtons were always liars . . . bad husbands—but wives—a bad lot! I would have killed him then and there on that night, as I had sworn that I would do—but I could not move from the place . . . I had no strength—the shock had stunned me, Vangie . . . Revenge! Revenge is sweet; and after years of waiting for it, my time had come at last!”

Tears were streaming from the eyes of Evangeline Hencastle.

“Grandfather—oh! grandfather dearest, do not, in this hour, talk of revenge. It is wrong to hunger so keenly for vengeance—I know it now—it is a terrible hanger. There is no peace where it dwells—there cannot be. Yes, well do I know it now; the past years have brought it very bitterly home to me—I mean, dear, that it is better to leave the avengement of our injuries in the hands of Him who will repay in His own good time. Think now, grandfather, try to think now of Him and of His infinite mercy, and not of revenge.”

“But I had sworn to have the life of the man who took away my daughter,” hissed Jasper Brooke between his hard gasps for breath, his wild gaze roving hither and thither over the room—and I kept my vow! Let me go! Let me go! and I will show you how I killed him.”

He struggled then to leave his bed; but Mark and the madhouse doctor were prompt to hinder the attempt.

“Vangie,” continued the old man feebly, sinking back exhausted upon his pillows, “on the next night—after that one on the bridge—you went to him at the Priory; I heard him tell you to come there. . . . I followed you; saw you meet him at the gate in the copse. . . . I watched you go down to the moat with him, and I hid myself close to you both in the round plantation hard by. . . . You quarrelled with him, Vangie . . . you left him—he was alone! At last, at last, thank God! He was alone, and I rushed upon him—I struck him to the earth. . . . I battered in his skull with my hook—blow after blow . . . blow after blow, until he lay dead there on the grass at my feet!”

Shuddering, Lina Hencastle hid her face as she knelt; clasped her hands and tried to pray—to pray for the soul of Jasper Brooke. Yet somehow before her shut and agonised eyes the innocent face of her child took shape; and she found her lips moving in a wild appeal to

Heaven that, in the years to come, when he should grow to be a man, the godless thirst for vengeance, the unholy passion of revenge, might never, never enter and sully his young heart.

“Let him be like his father,” she prayed—“strong, tender, and good!”

A scream from the old man recalled her to her surroundings. Rising quickly to her feet, she saw that Jasper, with a last flicker of strength, had leapt once more to a sitting posture, and with his shaking hand was pointing to a corner of the room.

“Look, Vangie—look!” he cried. “He has risen from his grave to mock me! His hair is dabbled with blood . . . his hands too—like mine—are smeared red! See! he moves this way . . . nearer and nearer he comes. . . . Ah, no! I am wrong. It is the beautiful face of Evangeline my own daughter—that beams so sweetly upon me . . . not his. . . . She is like an angel from Paradise—she smiles—she beckons! Vangie, Vangie, I am coming . . . coming, Vangie.”

The arms of the living Evangeline were wound about her grandfather; her head, in speechless grief, drooped to his shoulder. But no loving human clasp could hold the old man back from the “strait and dreadful pass.”

A radiant light seemed to overspread his gray face; the fierce fire of madness died out of his closing eyes.

Doctor Bell went softly to the door and opened it. The chaplain, hearing, immediately entered.

But he was too late. He was not wanted. For the old man lay dead upon Lina's breast.

CHAPTER XLIII.

FAREWELL.

ONE bleak late January day—a Saturday morning—dull yet freezing, when a small wind, keen as powdered steel, blew steadily from the north-east, threatening snow, Mrs. Maclean and Helen Hencastle, snugly shut in their warm carriage, drove on an errand connected with money matters to Coutts's bank in the Strand.

Mark, Lina, and the children—there were now three youngsters at Goole Grange (Phil, Vangie, and baby Nell respectively)—had spent the past Christmas in Portugal-square; for young Philip Hencastle was, by this date, old enough to go to pantomimes, and his fixed ambition at the age of six and a half was to be a clown at Drury Lane.

Helen and Aunt Lucy were shortly going down into Midlandshire to pay a return visit at the Grange; and the former to-day, at a certain famous toy-shop in Regent Street, intended to buy a wonderful rattle with silver bells for her little god-daughter, who was not yet a twelvemonth old.

It was mid-day. The Strand was blocked with traffic; with vans, drays, omnibuses, cabs and pedestrians, all in apparently inextricable confusion. Near to the dingy entrance of the bank a large crowd had gathered—had collected from all quarters in a moment after the surprising manner of London street-crowds—and hence the heavier block than usual in the thoroughfare.

A frightful accident, it appeared, had happened. Two hansoms, upon the slippery wood paving, had come into violent collision; and the driver of one of them—who, so said a policeman to a shivering wretch out of employment, at the time was driving recklessly, and moreover was not sober—had been pitched from the high seat of his vehicle head foremost to the pavement below. He was flung with crashing force upon the kerbstones, and was picked up by a passer-by—dead!

Finding the carriage at a standstill, Mrs. Maclean let down the window and looked out. She could see the grimy old bank well enough; but there seemed little prospect of their being able to reach it yet awhile.

“I think we had better alight and try to get through the crowd on foot, my dear,” Aunt Lucy said anxiously—“or Coutts's will

be closed before we can get there—it's Saturday, you know. At this rate we may sit here until doomsday. I wonder what has occurred!”

Helen being perfectly willing, down jumped Bing the footman and opened the carriage door and the two ladies got out to walk, if possible, the few yards to the bank.

The policemen, as Helen and Mrs. Maclean with difficulty made their path along the thronged pavement, were just in the act of lifting the unfortunate man from the ground to place him in cab or ambulance, and to take him—since there might be left in him some lingering spark of life—to Charing-Cross Hospital.

Another policeman, seeing the two ladies' predicament, roughly and effectually parted the crowd in order to let them pass through it.

Then in an instant Helen Hencastle's glance fell upon the dead man's face. The shabby old opera-hat that he had been wearing was gone, trampled under foot; his amber hair, bright and wavy as ever, was blown about his temples in the bleak winter wind. His clothes, once of fashionable cut, were now horribly poor and threadbare—the flesh was wasted from his bones.

Drink and dissipation and sin had done their fiendish work; and no trace of the glorious beauty which had once been his own now remained upon that human wreck.

Only the mother that bore him, had she been alive—or she whose love is yet greater than that of a mother—would have recognised the man to-day.

A woman's heart-broken cry had rung out above the roar and din around her; a woman had thrust her despairing way through the unsavoury and hindering crowd. Fainting, she sank upon the pavement, with her face upon the dead man's lips.

That wreck of manhood—the dissolute driver of a London hansom—was Guy Arminger!

At Goole Grange the busy and useful years go by, and life there is more like a beautiful dream, full of peace and content.

In the summer months Aunt Helen and Aunt Lucy are always at the Grange, and by the children their advent is hailed with nothing short of frenzied delight. Perhaps, however, wonderful London presents and confectionery may have something to do with the ever-boisterous welcome!

With Aunt Helen Hencastle, who is so cheerful and wise always, as sweet tempered and kind, there is boating on the mere in a punt which is—according to ancient Davy Crockett—as safe as the Ark itself; with tea in the meadows among the haycocks, and romps on the straw in the barns. And Aunt Helen, when she reads to them in the garden on Sunday afternoons, never forgets to tell the boys to be good boys, so that when they grow up they may be good men.

“If you are good and God-fearing, dears, you will be happy and prosperous, depend upon it,” says Aunt Helen—“not unless.”

She smiles as she speaks, and kisses them; though her eyes are full of a pathos which is beyond the children's comprehension. And then sometimes, after a long day spent in the clover-fields, they will all go together—yes, father, mother, and all—to Bureot churchyard, there to strew fresh wild-flowers upon “Uncle Phil's” grave.

THE END.

THE Rajahs of India have adhered to their idea of having a university in India for the instruction of young natives, but the step in advance which they have taken is that of affiliating their Indian University to an English one, especially on account of the educational status which would thus be bestowed on the Indian educational institution. Two eminent and very wealthy Rajahs have promised to visit England about May to organise the Indian scheme with the assistance of some of the distinguished heads of the English Universities.

MERRY MEG RALSTON.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

LET us return to Stephen Maitland, dear reader, and the marriage which was the all-absorbing topic in fashionable circles. There was not a more unhappy man in all London than he upon his wedding-morn.

He wished that the heavens would fall upon him, or that something might happen to interfere with the marriage; but the blue sky bent over him as serene as ever, and nothing happened.

Mrs. Maitland had sent a note to her son at his hotel, begging for a reconciliation, and stating that she would be at the wedding without fail; but never a word did she say about Meg Ralston.

It seemed like a dream to Stephen—his ride in a carriage through the cool crisp air to the church on that eventful morning.

He noticed one thing—that the sun did not shine that day; and he said to himself that it boded ill for his wedding.

The bride-elect and her mother welcomed him effusively.

"You naughty boy, you might have been a little earlier," said Mrs. Marston, tapping him on the arm.

As in a dream Stephen Maitland heard the steady roll of carriages and the hum of voices as the church began to fill with guests. He could not but own to himself that Lina looked radiantly lovely in her white-satin gown, the orange-blossoms crowning her dark head, and her tulle veil floating like a gossamer cloud behind her. But no such thrill of joy filled his heart as had thrilled it that other time when he beheld her robed thus to become his bride. Now, even the great bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley which she carried seemed rank, and appeared to affect him disagreeably.

Bitter anger filled the girl's heart to see how cold and stern he looked. She noticed that he had no word, no smile for her. If she had not loved him so madly, her pride would have rebelled, and she would have let him go his way even then.

But she could not part from him. He must be hers; she had vowed it. She had prayed for it; she had wearied Heaven with her appeals that he might be brought to her feet. At last she had resorted to strategy, and then she won him. She well knew that if she had waited for fate to bring him, she would have to wait for ever.

Better to be his wife though he did not love her, she told herself recklessly, than to go through life without him.

She almost shrank under the cold glance that rested upon her. She trembled, even in that moment, as she thought how he would hate her if he but knew how she had plotted to win him.

She was quite as dazed as Stephen himself, until she found herself standing beside him at the altar.

"Courage, pretty coz," whispered Dick Long, in a low undertone, as he passed her. "You are looking as pale as a snow-drop."

She heard him murmur to himself,—

"Good heavens! I hope we will have no postponement with this ceremony."

Those words nerved her as nothing else could have done. She drew herself up proudly, and clutched more tightly the flowers she held.

It was over at last! The words had been spoken which made her Stephen Maitland's wedded wife, through weal or through woe, till death did them part.

Then followed the sumptuous wedding-breakfast. While the merriment was at its height, Stephen touched her lightly on the arm.

"It wants but an hour and twenty minutes until train time. Would it not be best to slip away now and arrange your travelling toilet?"

"Yes," said Lina.

No one noticed their exit, and at last they were alone together, away from the throng of guests; but, much to the bride's disappointment, her newly-made husband did not seem to realise this

fact, and Lina's face flushed with disappointment.

He escorted her as far as the door of her *boudoir*, and there he left her, saying that he would return in half an hour, hoping that would be sufficient time to exchange her bridal-robes for her travelling-dress. She smiled and nodded, declaring that he should find her ready before that time.

He had shown her no affection; but she was happy, for all that, in the knowledge that she was his bride. She had separated him for ever, she told herself, from her beautiful rival, Meg Ralston, and he could never be anything to her.

Why should she mind a little coldness in the beginning? He would love her again at last, as he had loved her in the old times.

She listened to his firm, quick step going down the corridor, and her heart grew warm within her. She had won him by strategy; but, ah! why should it matter how she had gained him, she who loved him so? She meant to make him a good wife, and be so tender and loving to him, that he would learn to forget Meg Ralston, and be glad he had married her instead.

As for Stephen, he walked slowly on until he found himself at the door of the conservatory.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to get a cigar and return here for a quiet smoke," he thought.

He immediately suited the action to the thought. Was it fate that led him there? He had scarcely seated himself in one of the rustic arm-chairs ere he heard the sound of approaching voices.

He felt slightly annoyed that the retreat he had chosen was to be invaded at that particular moment.

He drew further back among the large-leaved plants, which would effectually screen him from the intruders, and hoped that their stay would be short.

"I tell you it will be impossible for you to see her," said a voice, which he instantly recognised as belonging to Lina's maid.

"But I must," retorted another voice which sounded strangely familiar. "Give her the note I just gave you, and I will wager you something handsome that she will see me. My good girl, let this plead for me with you!"

A jingle of silver accompanied the words, and Maitland could not help but smile at the magical effect the little bribe had.

"Of course, I'll take your note to her, sir," said the girl; "but that isn't promising she'll see you, you know. I will then have done my best in your interest."

Somehow the idea formed itself in Maitland's mind that it was Mrs. Marston for whom the man asked. Had he thought for one moment that it was Lina whom the man had asked for, he would have stepped forth and inquired of him what he wanted. It was probably some mendicant soliciting charity, no doubt, believing at this auspicious time that the lady's heart would be more open to charity.

So Maitland settled himself back in his chair, and scarcely gave a thought to the person at the other end of the conservatory.

In a very few moments he heard the *frou-frou* of a woman's garments and the patter of hurrying feet.

"Lina has come instead of her mother to see what this person wants," he thought; adding impatiently: "This will never do; we shall be late for the train, sure. I will have to take the man off her hands."

At that instant, Lina, panting with excitement, sprang across the threshold of the conservatory.

From his leafy seat Maitland could hear and see all that took place, while no one could see him.

He had risen, and was just about to step forward, when he caught sight of Lina's face. The colour of it held him spell-bound. It was as pale as death, and her eyes flashed fire. She was fairly frothing at the mouth, and the look of venomous rage that distorted her features fairly appalled him.

"You!" cried Lina, in a voice that sounded scarcely human. "Have you risen from the grave to confront me?"

"I am Captain Chevalier—at your service, madame," returned her companion with a low

bow. "As for my returning from the unknown shore, why, you flatter me in imagining that I have so much power, though I have been known to do some miraculous things before now. I am sorry that so many of my friends believe the ridiculous story that was set afloat regarding my supposed death. I am—"

"Why are you here? What do you want?" cried Lina, leaning heavily against a marble vase for support.

The captain laughed aloud—a harsh, horrible laugh.

"You are inclined to be brusque, my dear," he replied, tauntingly. "If you had asked me that question half an hour ago, I should have answered, 'I am here to stop your marriage with Stephen Maitland at whatever cost. I have travelled by night and by day, foot-sore and hungry, to get here in time to prevent it. I—I thought you had perished in the fire on the island, until I read the article in the paper announcing your marriage.'"

The look of hatred deepened on Lina's face.

"If this is all you have to say to me, permit me to say good-morning," she returned icily turning to leave the place.

He sprang between her and the door.

"You shall listen to me!" he cried. "I vowed in days gone by that you should never be happy with Stephen Maitland. You promised me that you would marry me, you scornful beauty, and those words changed my whole life."

"Well, now that I am another's bride, what can you do about it?" sneered Lina.

"I mean to see Maitland; and have a little talk with him," he answered. "I will tell him how, on the very night before the marriage was to have taken place at Penruddyn, I threw myself on my knees at your feet, and cried out to you to spare me; that you had played with my heart too long, and urged you to fly with me, and that you said, while I knelt before you, that if you decided to fly with me you would let me know by sunrise the following morning, but that you must have all night to think it over."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Do you dare face me and deny that?" continued Captain Chevalier, seizing her white wrist and holding it in an iron grip.

"No, I do not deny it," she answered. "But what of it? What do you expect to make of it?"

"This!" he cried, furiously. "I intend to be even with you. I will have a glorious revenge! I will see Stephen Maitland before he leaves this house, and say to him: 'I hope you may be happy with your bride, and I will laugh in his face, crying out: 'She eloped with me not so very long ago, and we went to my island home, where we kept in hiding until the sensation should blow over. We remained there, as I can prove by my servants, and I was a very slave to her sweet caprices.'"

"You would not say that!" cried Lina. "I would tell him my side of the story—that you kidnapped me, and held me by force on the island."

"Maitland is a man of the world," he returned, tauntingly. "Your side of the story is too flimsy for him or anyone else to believe. I will tell him you were only a too willing captive, and that while I was away attending to a little business the house accidentally caught fire, and you fled, in the confusion, to avoid the scandal which would ensue upon your being found there—as, of course, it would then leak out to the world—and that from that moment we separated. I read the story you gave out to the world—that you were kidnapped by robbers for the jewels you wore, and that they left you for dead; how you wandered around quite unconscious, and at last fetched up conveniently at the house of an old nurse. I could not but admire your ingenuity in giving to the world so clever a version of your absence. I see you have made a complete dupe of Maitland, and cheated him into believing the story. It is for me to undeceive him—to tear the veil of illusion from his eyes."

"Stop! You must not—you shall not!" cried Lina, wildly. "I—I will make terms with you. I see you are shabbily dressed and in want of money. I will give you a cheque, here and now, for a hundred pounds, if you will go away, never again to return, and have nothing to say—nothing. Your story would ruin me, false though it is."

The Captain arched his eyebrows.

"I think I could bring satisfactory proof as to where you passed your time."

Stephen Maitland, standing behind the foliage, was fairly stricken dumb by what he heard and saw.

He was spell-bound, like one turned to marble. He could not have lifted his voice to cry out to them, or stir hand or foot, to have saved his life.

What he heard astounded him, made his senses reel. A thunder-bolt from a clear sky, laying all in ruins about him, could not have shocked him more.

He had heard with his own ears Captain Chevalier's accusation and Lina's startling response, and that response had nearly killed him.

He did not love his bride, but he believed in her implicitly. All the old doubt which had filled his heart and killed his love for Lina came surging back like a raging torrent, sweeping over his very soul.

He dared not face his own thoughts or attempt to analyze them. He wished to Heaven that all this had happened before the ceremony had taken place which made this woman his wife.

In that instant the thought of Meg came to him—sweet little Meg, whose love for him he had read in her every glance, and to whom he had given all his heart with a deeper, stronger love than he had ever given to Lina, even in those old days. He had married Lina because he felt in honour bound—because he had pitied her so. But was she worth the terrible sacrifice? His heart gave the quick answer: "No—a thousand times no!"

How he longed to break from the terrible nightmare which seemed to fetter him!

"Your offer of a hundred pounds is a very fair one; but it will take double that sum to purchase my silence. You are quite right in your surmise. I am in need of money. With one fell swoop I have lost every shilling of my fortune, and now that all romance and sentiment are over between us, I have no compunction in showing you the mercenary side of my nature. Make it two hundred, and I will consent to hold my peace, seeing that I cannot mend matters by undoing the marriage."

"Come with me. We will settle this now and for ever. I have but five minutes to devote to you. Step this way," said Lina.

The next instant they had disappeared, and Stephen Maitland was left standing there alone.

Ah! not quite alone. He had for company the maddest thoughts that ever thronged a man's brain.

How long he stood there he never knew. His valet came in search of him. He found him at the end of the conservatory, standing motionless as a statue among the shrubbery. His face was white as death, and his eyes like balls of fire. One hand clutched a rustic seat, and the other was pressed tightly over his heart, while his cigar lay unlighted at his feet. For an instant the valet was frightened as he looked at him.

"Master," he said, "your bride bids me say to you that you have barely time to get into your travelling clothes."

He was shocked at the horrible laugh that broke from Maitland's lips.

Had his master gone mad? he wondered.

He followed the man without a word, and five minutes later, with a firm step, he was walking down the corridor toward his bride's apartments.

But ere he could knock upon the door, it was opened by Lina herself, who was surrounded by her maid of honour and a group of merry girl friends, who were laughing and chatting away blithely.

Without a word of comment he offered his arm to Lina, and walked slowly by her side through

the throng of friends to the carriage in waiting; and, amid showers of rice, peals of joyous laughter, and a world of good wishes, they were whirled away.

During the entire ride Maitland spoke no word. Lina watched him narrowly out of the corner of her eye, wondering why he looked so unusually angry. His lips were compressed until they were fairly livid, and his brows were lowering.

They were barely in time to catch the train, and it was not until they were seated in their own compartment that Stephen ventured a remark to the beautiful girl he had just made his wife, and who was looking up into his face with such puzzled wonder in her great dark eyes.

"I should like your attention for a few moments, Mrs. Maitland," he said, turning to her with a haughty sternness that was new to him.

"You are to have my full and undivided attention all the rest of my life, Steve," she said.

"I think not," he answered, grimly; "and it is upon this subject that I wish to speak."

A startled look shot over her face. What could he mean? She was not to be kept in suspense long.

"You are my wife," he went on; "the ceremony is barely over which made you that, yet I would recall it if I could."

Lina started to her feet and grasped his arm.

"What do you mean, Stephen?" she cried, piteously.

He threw off her hand as though it were a viper and its touch had stung him.

"We will not have any theatricals, if you please," he said, haughtily, waving her back. "A guilty conscience should need no accuser. It is best to speak plainly to you, and to the point. Suffice it to say I was in the conservatory at the time you entered. I heard all that passed between Captain Chevalier and yourself, and—and I was too horror-struck for words. You have deceived me most foully. I have taken to my bosom a traitor in the guise of a dove. I know you now as you are; the scales have fallen from my eyes. Now, here is what I propose to do,—We are to take a wedding-trip to Cornwall. We will go there, but when we reach our destination, you and I part for ever. I shall institute proceedings for a divorce at once, and I shall never know another happy moment until the divorce is granted. You shall be wife of mine but in name until we reach Cornwall, then we part for ever. The world is wide; we need never meet again."

A cry of terror broke from her lips. She clung to him with ice-cold hands.

"Oh, Stephen, Stephen, you will not do this!" she sobbed, wildly. "It would ruin my life—kill me!"

"You did not stop to think that marriage with you would ruin my life," he interposed, bitterly; adding sharply,— "What have you to say for yourself? Was Captain Chevalier's story false or true? Remember, I heard him say that he could furnish proof of all he charged."

Lina looked at him with dilated eyes. "It is useless to hide the truth from you," she whispered, hoarsely. "I see that you know all. Give me a chance to think—only to think of some way out of it. It would kill me, Stephen, to part from you. Better death than that. You are my world, the sunshine of my life. I would pine away and die without you. Oh, Steve, you must not leave me!"

He laughed a slow, cold, horrible laugh.

"The words are easily said," he replied, "but they do not sound sincere. I may as well make a clean breast of the whole matter," he went on, "and tell you the truth, Lina. I do not love you."

I—I—love another, though that love has never been confessed to the one I love. I—I—married you because I felt in honour bound to do so, and in doing so I crushed all the love that was budding in my heart. But was it worth the sacrifice of two lives? You cannot answer me. I shall not intrude upon you again until we reach Cornwall. You can send for your mother; it would be best for me to leave you in her charge. Telegraph back to her from the next station we arrive at. The moment we reach our destination we part for ever!"

But at that instant a strange event happened.

CHAPTER XXV.

LINA had been looking intently out of the window. Suddenly she sprang back with a wild cry that fairly froze the blood in Stephen's veins.

"What has frightened you, Lina?" he asked, gravely; and the look she turned on him he never forgot, there was something so terrible in the gaze of those dark eyes. She did not attempt to repel him from drawing near her, or from clasping her hands; but ever and anon she would laugh that horrible laugh that froze the blood in his veins.

"Let us talk the matter over calmly, Lina," he said at length, "and arrive at an understanding."

"There is no need," she returned. "As long as I understand, that is quite sufficient."

There was something in the tone of her voice that frightened him. He looked into her face. A greyish pallor overspread it. To Stephen's infinite surprise, Lina commenced to laugh immoderately; and these spells of laughter so increased as the moments flew by that he became greatly alarmed.

He wondered what he could do or say to comfort her. She grew so alarmingly hysterical as he watched her that it occurred to him he must find medical aid for her.

Fortune favoured him; he found a doctor seated in the compartment next to him. The gentleman was only too glad to be able to render him every assistance in his power.

One glance at the beautiful bride, and an expression of the gravest apprehension swept over the doctor's face.

"My dear air," he said, turning to Maitland and laying a hand on his shoulder, "I have something to tell you which you must summon all your fortitude to hear. Your young wife has lost her reason; she is dangerously insane."

Stephen started back as though the man had struck him a sudden blow.

"You are going to Cornwall, I believe," continued the doctor. "You will see the need of conveying her to an asylum, with the least possible delay, as soon as you arrive there. If there is anything which I can do to assist you during this journey, don't hesitate to call upon me. Consider me entirely at your service."

That was a day in Stephen Maitland's life that he never looked back to without shuddering. How he passed the long hours he never knew. Lina grew steadily more violent, and twice Stephen's very life would have paid the forfeit had it not been for his watchfulness.

With great difficulty he succeeded, with the doctor's assistance, in making the change from the train to the boat.

That was how his wedding journey began.

As night came on, the doctor touched him again on the arm.

"You have not left your young bride's side for an instant during all these long hours," he said. "You are wearing yourself out. Let me beg of you to go out on deck and take a few turns up and down; the cool air will revive you. Nay, you must not refuse; I insist upon it, or I shall have you for a patient before your journey is ended."

To this proposition, after some little coaxing, Stephen consented.

The doctor was quite right; the cool air did revive him amazingly. He felt feverish, and paced up and down the deck, a prey to the bitterest thoughts that ever tortured a man's soul.

One by one the stars came out in the great blue arch overhead, and mirrored themselves in the blue waters.

Stephen watched them in silence, his heart in a whirl. All at once it occurred to him that he knew the pilot of the boat—that, as he was Cornish, it wouldn't be a bad idea to interview him as to the location of some private asylum to which he might take Lina.

He acted upon this thought at once, and making his way to the upper deck, he recognised the man at the wheel in the dim light, although his back was turned to him.

"How are you, John," he exclaimed, tapping him on the shoulder. "Don't let me frighten you; it is your old friend, Maitland."

Much to his surprise, the pilot neither stirred nor spoke. Maitland stepped around, and faced him with some little laughing remark on his lips. But the words died away in his throat in a gasp. The dim light was falling full upon the pilot's features. What was there in that ashy face and those staring eyes that sent the cold blood back to his heart?

"John!" he cried, bending nearer the man, catching hold of his arm roughly as he rested upon the wheel. But his own dropped heavily to his side.

The terrible truth burst upon him with startling force—the pilot was dead at the wheel!

But even in the same instant that he made this horrible discovery, a still greater one dawned upon him. Another steamer came puffing and panting down the river, signalling the *Starlight*.

Each turn of the ponderous wheels swept her nearer and nearer, and the *Starlight* was drifting directly across her bow. It was a moment so freighted with horror it almost turned Stephen's brain. Five hundred souls, or more, all unconscious of their deadly peril, were laughing and chattering down below, and the pilot was dead at the wheel!

Ere he could give the alarm, a terrible catastrophe would occur. He realized this, and made the supreme effort of his life to avert it. But fate was against him. In his mad haste to leap down the stairway to give warning, his foot slipped, and he fell headlong to the floor of the lower deck, his temple, coming in contact with the railing, rendered him unconscious. Heaven was merciful to him that he did not realise what took place at that instant.

There was a sudden shock, a terrible crash, and half a thousand souls, with terrified shrieks on their lips, found themselves struggling in the dark waters!

It was a reign of terror that those who participated in it never forgot.

When Stephen returned to consciousness he found himself lying full length upon the green-sward, his face upturned to the moonlight, with the dead and dying around him, and the groans of the wounded ringing in his ears.

For an instant he was bewildered; then, with a rush memory mounted its throne in his whirling brain, and he recollected what had happened—the pilot dead at the wheel, another steamer sweeping down upon them; how he had rushed below to inform the passengers of their peril; how his foot had slipped, and he knew no more.

He realised that there must have been a horrible disaster.

How came he there? Who had saved him? Then, like a flash, he thought of Lina. Where was she? What had become of her? He struggled to his feet, weak and dazed.

He made the most diligent search for her, but she was nowhere to be found. Some one at length came hurriedly up to him. In the clear bright moonlight Stephen saw that it was the doctor in whose care he had left his young bride when he had gone out on deck for fresh air.

"You are looking for her, sir?" he asked, huskily.

"Yes," cried Stephen, tremulously, hardly daring to utter the words that hung on his lips.

"Are you brave enough to hear the truth?" said the doctor, slowly.

"Yes," answered Stephen, with a horrible premonition of what was coming.

"Your wife was lost in the disaster. I was by her side when the steamer was struck. We had both concluded to go on deck to join you. With the first terrible lurch we were both thrown headlong into the water. I did my utmost to save her, but it was not to be. A floating spar struck her, and she went down before my eyes."

For an instant Stephen neither moved nor spoke, the shock was so great.

"She is dead?" he interrogated, hoarsely.

"Yes," returned the doctor. "It was to be. It was the will of Heaven that she should not be saved, although I did my utmost to rescue her."

Stephen sunk down upon a fallen log, and

buried his face in his hands. For a moment he could scarcely realise Lina's untimely fate.

He had not loved her, it was true; still, he would have given his life to have had her reason restored to her.

For an hour or more he forgot his own sorrow in alleviating the terrible distress of others.

When there was no more assistance that he could render, he thought it would be best for him to get away from the place as quickly as possible.

Scarcely heeding whither he went, he took the first path that presented itself. How far he walked he had not the least idea. In the distance he saw lights gleaming, and he knew that he was approaching some little village. He said to himself that it would be best to stop there for a few hours—until daylight at least, and to recover Lina's body if possible.

He followed the path until it brought him to the edge of a little brook. The white, shining stones that rose above the eddying little wavelets seemed to invite him to cross to the other side. Midway over the brook he paused.

Was it only his fancy, or did he hear the sound of music and revelry?

He stood quite still and looked around him. The scene seemed familiar.

For an instant Stephen was startled; but as he gazed he recognised the place. He must be at St. Maw's. Up there, through the trees, lay the home of Captain Ryder, the uncle of little Meg Ralston.

As he stood gazing at it, the clock in some adjacent steeple slowly struck the midnight hour. He wondered if Meg was there. How he felt like telling some one his troubles!

CHAPTER XXVI.

EARLY the next morning Stephen was at the scene of the disaster, though he was scarcely fit to leave his bed at the village hostelry. Most of the bodies had been recovered or accounted for, save that of Lina.

Stephen was just about to offer a large reward to any one who would recover it, when two fishermen were seen making their way in a little skiff toward the scene of the wreck.

There was some object covered over with a dark cloak in the bottom of their boat. They were making for the shore upon which the wreck was strewn.

Stephen sprang forward.

"Is it the body of a woman you have there?" he cried.

They lifted it out tenderly and uncovered the face. It was mutilated beyond recognition, and the clothing was so torn and soiled by the action of the waves that scarcely enough of it remained intact to disclose its colour or texture.

There was great consternation in London when Stephen Maitland returned there with the body of his bride, and more than one whispered: "Fate seems to have been against that marriage from the very first! 'What is to be, will be.' These two proposed to marry, but a Higher Power decreed that they were not for each other."

The same thought had come to Stephen as he paced wearily up and down his own room.

It was a nine-days' subject for pity and comment, and then the public ceased to think about it, and Lina's fate was at last forgotten.

Stephen Maitland then arranged his business for a trip abroad, and when he said good-bye to his mother and Mrs. Marston, he added that he might be gone years, perhaps for ever.

In the very moment that he uttered those words how strange it was that the thought came over him that he might never see Meg Ralston again.

But this thought, at such a time, he put from him as unworthy to linger in his breast. And when the *Dawnless* sailed away, among her passengers was Stephen Maitland.

He watched the line of shore until it disappeared from his sight, and a heavy sigh throbbed on his lips as his thoughts dwelt sadly on Lina, his fair young bride, who lay sleeping on the hill-side just where the setting sun glistened the marble shaft over her grave with a touch of pale gold.

Let us return to the cottage home of Meg Ralston, dear reader, and see what is taking place there on this memorable day.

For a week after the unfortunate young girl was brought under that roof, carried there from the wreck, her life hung as by a single thread. The waves had been merciful to her, for they had baulked death by washing her ashore.

A handkerchief, marked with the name "Maud Harrington" had been found floating near her, and this, they supposed, belonged to her.

How strange it is that such a little incident can change the whole current of a human being's life.

The daily papers far and wide daily chronicled the rescue of Maud Harrington. No one recognized the name, no friends came to claim her. They had made a pitiful discovery, however, in the interim—the poor young creature had become hopelessly insane, whether through fright, or by being struck upon the head by a piece of the wreck, they could not as yet determine.

It was decided that the stranger should remain beneath that roof until the danger attending her critical condition should have passed, and it be considered safe to remove her to some institution.

She had a goodly sum of money in a purse which they found upon her person. There were costly gems in her small ears and gleaming on her white hands. It seems strange that she should have been travelling alone.

No one among the passengers who had been saved seemed to remember her, and at length even the newspapers stopped their inquiries for friends or relations of the unfortunate girl. It seemed as though she were quite alone in the world.

Meg's pity for her knew no bounds.

She pleaded with her uncle with all the eloquence she was capable of, to allow the stranger to remain beneath that roof.

"Do let her stay, uncle," she cried. "She will be such company for me. Everyone ought to do some good deed in his or her life. Let me take care of this poor demented girl."

Captain Ryder looked at his niece in amazement.

"Now, Meg," he cried, "are you in your right senses, or are you dreaming? The idea of wanting to keep this insane girl in the house, and looking after her as though she were a little child! A fine companion she would make! I don't want to turn my house into an insane asylum."

But in the end Meg's pleading prevailed, and Maud Harrington was installed as a fixture in the little homestead.

Meg would sit and watch her by the hour, noting how soft and white her hands were, and how lady-like her manners. She said to herself that she must be a perfect lady, and to the manner born.

There was something so pathetic about her—(she was by no means violent)—that Meg could not help but love her. Her dark, luminous eyes always had a far-away look in them; and the words were ever upon her lips that she was parted from her lover as soon as her journey ended; that he had discovered all, and now he had ceased to love her; that twice she had nearly won him, but that fate had stepped in between them.

Of course Meg knew that her words were but the outgrowth of a deranged mind, and that there had been no lover on the steamer "Starlight" with Maud Harrington. All day long the girl would wring her hands and call for her lover, until it made Meg's heart bleed to hear her.

But there was no taunting sense to any remarks that she made. She seemed so grateful to Meg, who in turn grew very fond of her strange charge.

Meg was not a reader of the newspapers. She never knew that Stephen Maitland had been on the ill-fated "Starlight" on that memorable night, and that he had lost his bride.

Philip Keston, who had been only too glad to send Meg the item announcing Stephen Maitland's marriage to another, took good care not to let her know that he was free again. So the girl dreamed of him as being off in Europe somewhere, happy with his beautiful bride. Of course, he had forgotten her long since—that was to be expected; in fact, she would not have

it otherwise. No self-respecting young girl would care to have a married man's thoughts linger on her.

Time, which does not linger with the present, spread its wings, and flew rapidly on. Two months had gone by since that Hallowe'en night.

It had made little change in Captain Ryder's household. The Captain still plied his trade up and down the river, Meg divided her time between taking care of her uncle's humble cottage and watching over poor Maud Harrington.

There were times when the girl really seemed to understand just how much Meg was doing for her, and certainly it was gratitude that looked out of the dark, wistful eyes.

There were times too when Meg was quite sure that memory was struggling back to its vacant throne.

"Who are you?" she would whisper, earnestly gazing into Meg's face. "And what is your name? It seems as if I had heard it and known it in some other world. I could almost fancy that it was my own."

Meg would laugh amusedly at this. Once, much to her surprise, when she questioned her as to why she was sitting in the sunshine, thinking so deeply upon some subject, Maud Harrington answered simply:

"I was thinking about love!"

"Love!" echoed Meg. "Why, where did you hear the word?"

"I was standing by the garden gate to-day when two young girls passed," said Maud. "They were speaking to each other about love. I listened, and I heard them say that without love no young girl can be happy, and I repeated those words all the way back to the house—without love no young girl can be happy!" Now, tell me, Meg Ralston, what is this that all young girls must have to be happy?"

Meg buried her face in her hands, and a stifled sob broke from her lips.

"If you have no knowledge of what love is, you are better off. Never seek to know what it is. Many find it an arrow with a poisonous sting!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALTHOUGH several days had passed since Meg had had her conversation with Maud Harrington, yet the girl could not forget the words she had heard.

She would ask Meg over and over again to repeat them. The subject seemed to have a strange fascination for her.

"I wonder if I could make her understand, if I were to tell her my strange story?" thought Meg.

It seemed to her that life would not be so unendurable if she had some one to open her heart to and confide in, even though that some one could scarcely comprehend the meaning of the words she uttered.

"Let me tell you of a love story in real life," said Meg, flinging herself on a hassock at Maud's feet and burying her golden head in the folds of her companion's dress—"surely the most pitiful story that was ever told."

"There was a young girl," she began, "who lived in a little quiet village to which few strangers ever found their way. She had a cousin who was not very kind to her, and who influenced this girl's uncle to be very hard and cruel to her, though he was naturally a very kind-hearted man. To be brief, one day the girl played a mischievous prank upon her cousin, and fearful of her terrible anger, she fled to one of the little islands adjacent, intending to remain there only long enough to give her cousin's anger time to cool."

"She had forgotten to secure her little boat before she walked up the sands. When she came to search for it, she found it had drifted away, and she would have been forced to remain on the island until daylight on the morrow, had it not been that she was rescued by a young man who was rowing past and heard her shouts for help."

"He took her back to her humble home,

earnestly telling her that if her cousin or her uncle persecuted her she could come to him.

"After the girl had parted from the handsome stranger, life was never the same to her."

"Her uncle was terribly cruel to her when she came home, and she was obliged to flee from him. She then went to the handsome stranger, and begged his protection."

"Ah, how kind and gentle he was! He sent her to school at his expense, and ended by bringing her, as his ward, to his own home and to his lady-mother."

"During these days beneath that roof the girl learned to love him with all her heart; and it was then, when it was too late to call back her heart's love for him, that she learned how he loved another. When she heard that, it seemed to the poor girl that her life's sun had suddenly set in the darkest gloom. She never knew until then how much she cared for him."

"To end a pitiful story, he married the girl he loved, and now they are abroad, happy in each other's love. He will never know of the broken heart he has left behind him."

"For the first time in many days Maud Harrington seemed to actually understand."

"What was his name?" she asked, thoughtfully.

"For an instant Meg hesitated. What did it matter whether she told her or not?"

"Stephen—"

"Meg, Meg, where are you?" called Captain Ryder's voice from a room below. "Come here instantly; I want you."

The half-uttered sentence died away on her lips.

Perhaps it was better so. Who knows? Had she mentioned the name of Stephen Maitland to this girl, no one could have foretold what the consequences might have been.

For an hour or more after Meg had left her, Maud Harrington sat thinking deeply, with her face buried in her hands.

"Stephen—Stephen," she murmured over and over again. "How strange that that name should thrill my heart so! Have I ever known anyone named Stephen? Oh, if my poor brain would but perform its proper functions, and think!"

There were times when Maud Harrington seemed rational enough; but her past life was a blank to her. She always insisted that Meg's face was the first she had ever seen in this world.

It was the first one which she had beheld when consciousness came to her when she lay on her sick-bed; and to say that she fairly idolized Meg was but expressing it very mildly.

In the moments when she was rational her thoughts were always of her, and she would have laid down her life for Meg. The girl's gratitude was the talk of the village.

The day came, quite unexpectedly, when she proved that devotion with a heroism that people never forgot. It happened in this way,—

One cold, frosty morning early in January, in tidying up Dick's cage, the door was accidentally left open, and the little canary, who was Meg's especial pride, slipped from his cage and flew out at the open door-way, into the bitter cold of the winter morn.

With a cry of terror, Meg sprang after her pet. Down the village street he flew swift as an arrow, making straight toward the river, she following as fast as her nimble feet could carry her, wringing her hands and calling to him. Maud Harrington followed in the rear, crying out to Meg it was useless to attempt to catch him, as he was making straight for the river. On the river's brink Meg paused, and with tears in her eyes, watched her pet in his mad flight. By this time Maud had caught up to her.

"Do come back, Meg!" she cried, in alarm. "You are hatless and cloakless, and you are shivering with the bitter cold."

At that instant Meg saw the bird whirl in mid-air, spread his yellow wings, then fall headlong upon the ice that covered the river, and lay there, panting and quivering, chilled to the heart, and scarcely a red away.

With a great cry, Meg sprang forward, and was soon making her way, as quickly as the ice would permit, to where the canary lay. But the ice was not strong enough to bear her.

Maud's words of warning came too late. There was a crash, a cry, and in a single instant Meg had disappeared from sight; the ice had given way beneath her weight, and the dark waters had swallowed her.

For an instant Maud Harrington stood dazed; then, with a shriek of terror, she flew over the ice like a storm-driven swallow, and was kneeling at the spot where Meg had disappeared, watching breathlessly for her to come to the surface.

Once, twice, the golden hair showed for an instant; but each time it eluded the grasp of the girl who made such agonising attempts to catch it.

The third and last time it appeared.

Would she be able to save her?

Maud turned her white face up to Heaven, and her lips moved; then she reached forward, plunged her right arm desperately down into the ice-cold water, grasped at the sinking form, and caught it; but she could not draw the body up.

"Meg! Meg!" she cried; "you will slip away from me! I cannot hold you!"

Great wild cries rose to her lips.

"Help! help!" she shrieked, in terror. But there was no help at hand.

All in vain were her pitiful cries. Maud's hands were torn and bleeding, and slowly but surely freezing. They must soon relax their hold, and poor Meg would slip down, down into a watery grave.

Ten, twenty minutes passed. Surely it was by a superhuman effort that that slender arm retained its burden; but it could not hold out much longer.

So intense was her terror, Maud Harrington did not realize her own great physical pain.

To her great joy, she beheld at length two men driving leisurely down the road that led by the river.

She tried to call out to them; but her voice died away in her throat, making no sound.

She made the effort of her life to signal them. If they turned their heads ever so slightly they must see her and come to the rescue.

To her great horror, they drove on, and the sound of their horses' hoofs ringing along the frozen road was soon lost in the distance. She was again left alone with the girl whose life depended upon her strained arm, holding her above water and against the swift, swirling tide that was slowly but surely bearing her downward. Long since Meg had ceased to struggle, and lay a dead weight in her grasp. Maud felt her strange clutch relaxing. By an almost superhuman effort she attempted to cry out again.

This time she was successful. Her voice rose shrill and clear over the barren waste of frozen ice, over the waving trees, and down the road beyond. It reached the ears of a man who was hurrying rapidly through the snow-drifts.

"What was that?" he muttered, stopping short. "It sounded like a human being in distress."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"HELP! help!" the words echoed sharp and clear again through the frosty morning air, and this time the man walking hurriedly along the road heard it distinctly, paused, and turned a very startled face towards the river.

It required but a glance to take in the terrible situation: the young girl stretched at full length on the ice, holding by main strength something above the aperture in the ice; it was certainly a woman's head.

"Courage, courage!" he cried in a voice like a bugle blast. "Help is at hand! Hold on!" And in less time than it takes to tell it, he had reached the girl's side.

"Save her, save her!" gasped Maud Harrington. "My hands are frozen. I can not hold on any longer;" and with this she sank back unconscious, and the burden she held would have slipped from her cramped fingers back into the dark, cold waves had not the stranger caught it in time. It required all his herculean strength, however, to draw the body, slim though it was, from the water.

One glance at the marble-white face, and he uttered a little cry.

"Great heaven! if it isn't Meg Rals'on!" Laying his dripping burden on the bank, the man lost no time in dragging Maud Harrington back from her perilous position; then the stranger, who was one of the fishermen on the coast, summoned assistance, and the two young girls were quickly carried back to the cottage, and a neighbouring woman called in.

Meg was the first to recover consciousness. She had suffered a terrible shock, a severe chill, but the blood of youth bounded quickly in her veins. Save a little fever, which was the natural result of the counter-action, she was none the worse for her thrilling experience.

With Maud Harrington it was different. The doctor who had been called in shook his head gravely over her condition.

"It may be a very serious matter," he said, slowly; "it may result in both hands having to be amputated, leaving her a cripple for life. De-ranged and a cripple!" he added, pityingly, under his breath. "It would be better far if the poor thing were to die than to drag out the existence marked out for her."

"You will do all that you possibly can to save her hands," said Captain Ryder, anxiously.

"Yes, certainly," returned the doctor, "all that it is possible to do."

Meg's gratitude knew no bounds when she learned how near she had come to losing her life, and that she owed her rescue to the heroism of faithful Maud. She wept as she had never wept before when she discovered how dearly it might cost her friend.

Alas! how true it is that trouble never comes singly!

At this crisis of affairs, Captain Ryder suddenly succumbed to a malady that had been troubling him for years, and Meg found herself thrown homeless, penniless upon the world. She was thankful that poor Maud did not realize the calamity that had overtaken her. That humble cottage roof which had sheltered her so long would cover her head no more.

"There is only one thing to be done, and that is to place the girl in an asylum," the neighbours advised.

This Meg stoutly declared she never would do as long as she had two hands to work for the unfortunate girl.

"I shall turn all my little possessions into money," she declared, "and go immediately to London and find something to do. She shall go with me and share my fortunes; my last crust of bread I will divide with her."

Every one thanked Heaven that by almost a miracle Maud's hands were saved to her.

A few days later Meg bid adieu for ever to St. Maw's, accompanied by the girl who followed her so patiently out into the world.

How strange it is that London is generally the objective point for the poor and friendless in search of employment.

Meg had concluded that this would be the best place to go. For a week before she started on her journey, she tried to talk the matter over with Maud, but it was all in vain. The girl seemed to catch a glimmering idea of her words. Her answer was always the same—she was willing to go wherever Meg went, it mattered little to her where.

She comprehended in a vague way that Captain Ryder was dead, and that the cottage would no longer be home to them. With the faith of a child, she turned to Meg.

"You will take care of me," she said, with innocent simplicity. "I will link my fate with yours."

The journey to the great metropolis was a long one. They reached there just as the sun was sinking in the west.

It was quite a discouraging outlook to poor Meg, for, counting the money she had left in her purse, she found she had but forty-five shillings remaining.

The first thing to be thought of was shelter. Inquiring at a druggist's opposite the station, she found that there was a small lodging-house down a back street.

Meg soon found the street and number to which

she had been directed. A pleasant-faced maid opened the door. She was immediately shown into the parlour, and a brisk, bustling little woman soon put in an appearance.

She looked curiously at the two pretty young girls when she learned their errand.

"This is a theatrical lodging-place," she said, "and all of our rooms are full save two, and they are to be occupied on the twentieth. You might have them up to that time, I suppose," she added, unwilling to let the chance of making a few extra shillings go by her. "Or perhaps you and your sister could make the smaller one do for both."

"We could indeed!" eagerly assented Meg.

She had noticed that the woman had called Maud Harrington her sister, and she said to herself that perhaps it would be as well to let it go at that, as it would certainly save much explanation.

And then again, if the landlady knew that her companion had lost her reason, she would never allow them to stay there overnight, no matter how harmless she might be.

Meg started out bright and early the next morning to search for employment, cautioning Maud over and over again not to quit the room, and to answer no questions that might be put to her.

Searching for work was no light matter, as thousands of young girls who walked the city of London, footsore, in the same quest, could readily attest.

After the first day's experience, she returned, heartsick and discouraged, to the boarding-house.

"Didn't find anything to do, eh?" remarked the landlady, sympathetically, as she met her at the door.

"No," said Meg; "but I hope to meet with better luck to-morrow."

"Why don't you try to get on the stage," said Mrs. Thompson, patting the girl's shoulder. "You are young, and, to tell you the truth, you've an uncommonly pretty face."

"The stage!" echoed Meg. "Why, I was never on the stage in all my life. What could I do on the stage?"

"You would make your fortune," declared the woman, "if you were clever. And there's your sister, too, she is almost as pretty as yourself. She'd like it, I am sure."

At that moment a woman who was passing hurriedly through the dimly-lighted hall stopped short.

"What is this I hear, Mrs. Thompson?" she exclaimed. "Are you advising your new lodgers, those two pretty, young girls, to go on the stage?" she asked, curiously.

"Yes," returned the other. "They are looking for work, and drudgery would be such hardship for them."

"The drudgery of the outside world is nothing compared to the drudgery of the stage. It is all rosy enough in the eyes of young girls; they go on with a great deal of vim and a world of ambition, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it ends the same way—a wrecked life, blasted hopes."

"The men connected with the company may be very distasteful to you, but you have to swallow all your repugnance."

"Surely it's a cruel life for a sensitive young girl. The hilarious applause of the country audience in front falls very short of the glorious fame they pictured; and perhaps there's a *roué* or two in the company. If so, he marks out the timid young girl as his prey. To get his ill will means her discharge for some little petty offence he can work up."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Did you tell the young girl this, Mrs. Thompson, when you advised her to go on the stage?" said the woman, looking eagerly into Meg's lovely, perturbed face.

"Picture to her the pitfalls that the alluring light hides from her eyes until her feet stumble into them. It's all very nice and rosy for the young star that has capital to push her to the top of the ladder at the onset, and plenty of relatives to go with her to keep wolves at bay, but

for the young girl who must make her own way from the foot of the ladder—ah, well! People ask why so many fall by the way-side, and, after a life-time before the foot-lights, glare, die penniless and unmourned, and are buried by money from the Actor's Fund. Ah! ask any one who has a knowledge of it and they will tell you the same."

"This is the end of many a girl's golden dream. Where one succeeds ten thousand fail. On the stage, it's the woman who has plenty of gold at her command who gets to be a star. It isn't a question of talent—oh, dear, no! Now come, own up, Mrs. Thompson, haven't I told the truth?"

The landlady was obliged to admit that this was the case.

"But," she added, turning entreatingly to her friend, "it wouldn't do any harm for this girl to try the stage until something better turned up, and to tell the exact truth, Mr. Hazel, manager of the Company, who is stopping with me, took quite a fancy to this girl's pretty face, and he told me he would find a place in his company for her if she would leave her sister and go out on the road; and, furthermore, that he would push her, and take great pains in learning her all the stage business."

Mrs. Thompson's companion laughed a cold, freezing laugh.

"The *roué*!" she muttered, under her breath.

"Don't accept that offer until I have a chance to talk to you," she said, turning to Meg.

But she was never destined to have that conversation with the girl. A few moments later she received a telegram that called her from the city at once.

Had this not happened, Meg's life would have been entirely different.

That evening, by his eager request, the manager was introduced to Meg.

He told a story so glowing, that, in spite of the warning she had received, Meg felt sorely tempted to accept his offer of a position on the stage. He promised her such a wonderful large salary and such grand times that she was surprised.

Now, which should she believe, the lady's story whom she had seen that afternoon, or the handsome young manager's who seemed to take such a wonderful interest in her?

Ah, if she could but talk it over with Maud! She attempted to explain it to her, but it was useless. There were times when she answered rationally enough; then again her mind would lapse into vacancy, and she did not seem to realise what Meg was saying to her. Meg's only objection in not accepting the offer was the thought that she should be parted from Maud, which, the manager assured her, would have to be, as he had no room in his company for two.

(To be continued.)

DOLLY'S GHOST.

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THE cold topaz light of the spring evening glimmered faintly on the shingled sides of the old farmhouse as Dolly Miller leaned a second on the gate to look a last farewell.

In five minutes the stage would come along to bear her away to a new destiny.

An auction sale had taken place the day before; the old rooms were all dismantled. Uncle Will had been taken away to Mrs. Brown's, where he was to "board out," the price of an old cherry bedstead, a tall clock, and a set of antique English crockery-ware.

"By that time," Dolly had cheerfully said, "I can, perhaps, send a little money. For of course I shall begin to earn something very soon. And he must think he's only on a visit, and be sure you don't tell him I've gone to London, and the old place is shut up. It would break his heart."

"I dunno's he'll notice any difference," said Mrs. Brown, who was fat and phlegmatic. "Most things are alike to a man that's over eighty, so long's he gets plenty to eat and a good bed to sleep on."

"Oh, but Uncle Will is very observing!" said Dolly, with tears in his bright eyes. "And he was father's uncle, and was very good to him once."

"It'll be all right, don't you fret," said Mrs. Brown.

But nevertheless Dolly felt conscience stricken to think how she had given the old man the slip, even though it were for his good.

Even now as she came up from the little churchyard, with her hand full of the yellow crocuses she had gathered from her father's grave, she fancied she could see Uncle Will in his old place on the porch steps, the bleak wind blowing his white hair about. Was it—could it be possible—

He rose, with a senile smile, and came toward her, carrying in one hand a little bundle wrapped in a red silk handkerchief.

"Well, Dolly," said he, "I've come back. I didn't nohow fancy Betsy Brown's cookin', and them children was awful noisy. But I couldn't get in. Who locked the door?"

"Oh, Uncle Will," cried Dolly in a sort of despair, "you must go back!"

Against the yellow glow of the topaz sky the form of the stage-coach was already outlined.

"Goin' away!" said Uncle Will, cheerfully. "Well, I guess I'll go, too. You and me, Dolly—we had'n't o't to be parted."

"Dear, dear!" said Dolly, wringing her hands. "What shall I do—what can I do?"

In the great city Dolly Miller felt as solitary as the traveller in some Eastern desert. Mr. Wentworth, who had bought the big carved Dutch cabinet with the secret drawer, and the old arm-chair, looked at her with unrecognizing eyes.

"Oh, I remember now!" said he. "We've sold the Antwerp cabinet, but the arm-chair don't somehow go off. It's a great curiosity, of course. People come and look at it, and then go away again. I think myself that Mr. Dawson has put rather a high price upon it. Eh? What did you say? Work! But I don't know what you can do."

"I can do anything!" said Dolly, valiantly. "I must do something—or starve."

"Is it so bad as that?"

Mr. Wentworth had pleasant dark eyes and spoke kindly, as he looked down upon her from his high desk at the extreme end of the long, dreary salesroom.

Dolly tried—and not without success—to keep away the tears.

"I supposed," said she, "that everybody could do well in the city. But I've found out my mistake."

Just then a paper-capped workman came up and spoke a word or two to Mr. Wentworth.

He looked vexed.

"Well," said he, "send for someone else. If she comes back again I won't take her on. Let that be fully understood."

Dolly looked quickly up.

"Who is it," said she—"a typewriter or an upholsterer?"

He smiled.

"Neither," said he. "Only the old woman who keeps the furniture dusted and rubbed up. She has an unfortunate partiality for the bottle, I'm sorry to say."

"I could dust chiffoniers and rub up sideboards," promptly spoke Dolly.

"It's only ten shillings a-week," said Wentworth. "But we might make it fifteen."

"Ten shillings a-week is better than nothing a-week," said logical Dolly.

"Very well," said Mr. Wentworth, "the place is yours."

And inwardly he liked her pluck.

Thus Dolly Miller, who had had her vague yearnings after a "career," settled down to work in Dawson and Wentworth's great firm.

She went about in a big bib apron, with a feather-duster in one hand and a bottle of furniture oil in the other. She viewed the widow saucers critically, saw that keys were fitted properly and mouldings polished up. And when the cashier paid her her first fifteen shillings she felt rich beyond expression.

"The stock never looked so nice," said the foreman. "She's a rare 'un to work."

"She sold that old Marie Antoinette writing-

desk to Mrs. Davidson while I was gone," said the heads aleman. "Made as good a bargain as I could have done myself."

"She discovered the gas-leak in the basement," declared the errand-boy; "and the plumbers vowing and declaring all the time that there wasn't none there. Oh, I tell you Miss Miller's got her wits about her!"

A few days afterward Mr. Dawson came bustling into the office.

"What's this I hear!" said he. "People tell me the place is getting famous. Something concerning a ghost. What is it all about?"

"Well, I can't say anything decided about it," said Wentworth, "a sort of rumour connected with the old chair and a whiteheaded old spectre that sits in it. Three or four of the West-end customers have been down to look at it already this morning, and we've had two newspaper reporters and an artist from an illustrated weekly during the week."

"Has any one seen the ghost?" asked Dawson, incredulously.

"I haven't," said Wentworth.

"Where do they keep the chair?" demanded Dawson.

Wentworth laid down his pen.

"I'll show you," said he.

Dolly Miller was polishing up some ancient brass escutcheons on a century-old bureau down in the basement, and singing at her work.

She smiled at the partners as they went past.

"We're coming down to see the ghost," said Wentworth.

Dolly stopped her work.

"What ghost?" said she.

"Haven't you heard?" Wentworth called back from the further room. "The ghost that sits in your old chair."

"A—ghost!"

Dolly grew very pale. She pressed her hand to her head.

"Why, you aren't afraid of ghosts, be you, Miss Miller?" said the errand-boy, who had come downstairs to get the bunch of odd keys for one of the salesmen.

"It's very strange," said Wentworth, re-appearing. "You must have been mistaken, Dawson."

"I tell you," said the senior partner, whose rubicund face wore a tallows whiteness, "I did see an old man there when first we came in."

"Then what became of him?" jeered Wentworth.

"I don't know," said Dawson, wiping his damp forehead with a China silk pocket-handkerchief. "It was just a sudden glimpse, you know. He sat there in the old chair, and when I looked again he was gone. Why, man alive, do you doubt what I'm saying?"

"This is quite unaccountable," said Wentworth. "Are you sure you're not mistaken?"

"Am I sure I'm standing here?" retorted Dawson. "Let's get upstairs. Sell that chair, Wentworth, the first offer you get. There's something uncanny about it."

"Sell it!" echoed Wentworth. "Not for a thousand pounds! That chair's going to make our fortune yet. I didn't know yesterday but that we were going into liquidation. Things look very different to-day."

On the stairs they met three distinct parties going down to see the chair, and, although no definite statement was made, there was a general understanding that the flurried old gentleman with the red face, who was being helped into the elevator, had seen the ghost.

"I can't think what sort of a cobweb Dawson has got into his brain," said Wentworth. "I didn't see anything."

Meanwhile Dolly had dropped her chamois-skin and vanished into the dark recesses of the inner room, where the chair had been placed.

"Uncle Will," she whispered, energetically, "you promised me you'd be very good and quiet if I'd let you come to the shop with me sometimes."

"It's the old chair we used to have at home, Dolly," piped Uncle Will from behind a beetle-bound wardrobe. "I can't somehow set easy in none of the rest of 'em."

Tears brimmed into Dolly's eyes. There was

something ineffably piteous in the poor old octogenarian's shrinking figure and white hairs, and the girl made up her mind at once. She ran up stairs to Mr. Wentworth.

"Can I speak to you, sir?" said she.

Wentworth laid down his pen.

"I hope you're not going to leave us, Miss Miller?" said he.

"Yes, I am!" said Dolly. "I can't stand it any longer!"

"Why, what's wrong?"

"The—ghost!" sobbed Dolly.

"Why, you never mean to say—"

"Yes, I do!" cried Dolly. "It's my old granduncle, William Miller! It's no ghost at all!"

"What?" cried Mr. Wentworth.

"Yes," faltered Dolly. "He lives with me, and the little bedroom's very small, and only warmed from the hall, and so he's got in the way of coming here, with his dinner wrapped in a paper, and sitting by the big heater in the back wareroom where no one can see him, while I'm about my work. He's very harmless, sir, and quiet; but a few days ago he found the old chair that was brought from the Miller homestead. And he will sit there, except when he hears a strange footstep, and then he slinks away as rapidly as he can. But of course I can see now that it's all wrong. And I'll go away at once. My landlady knows a place where they want a music-teacher for two little girls."

"My dear Miss Miller," said Mr. Wentworth, "you shall do nothing of the kind. Do you know that this strange chance medley of events is going to be the making of this house? The firm of Dawson and Wentworth is getting to be the fashion at last. We should really miss you—very much indeed. Our stenographer gave me notice this morning that she's going to better herself. I think I heard you say once that you understood the business. Would you like the place?"

"Oh," cried Dolly, clasping her hands, "it seems almost too much good luck to be true!"

With the rise of salary a better lodging was procured for poor old Uncle Will, and he was contented to sit at home and bask in the sunshine of a sunny south window, with the landlady's cherry-cheeked daughter to look after him at odd times, while Dolly took down stenographic notes and rattled the keys of the typewriter with a will.

And she had plenty to do; for the fortunes of the firm of Dawson & Wentworth were steadily rising now, "thanks," as the junior partner remarked, "to the ghost."

And one evening Dolly came home with cheeks redder than the two big peaches she brought to the old man.

"Uncle Will," said she, "would you like to go back to the old homestead?"

"Would I like to go to Heaven?" said Uncle Will.

"Because," said Dolly, "I'm going to be married, and my future husband says I shall have the dear old place for a country home, and you are to live with us."

"Is it Mr. Wentworth?" said Uncle Will.

"How did you know?" smiled Dolly.

"Oh, I dunno," said Uncle Will. "I sort o' guessed. I shouldn't wonder if you was pretty middlin' happy with him."

And he began to pare the biggest peach with his jack-knife.

Mr. Wentworth came that evening to see the old man.

"Dolly is my luck," said he. "I can't let Dolly pass out of my life."

"Dolly's a good gal," said Uncle Will.

But he never knew the ghostly part he had unconsciously played in the drama of events.

JAPANESE auctions give rise to none of the noise and confusion which attend such sales in Europe and America. Each bidder writes his name and bid on a slip of paper, which is placed in a box, and when the bidding is over the auctioneer opens the box, and the goods are declared to belong to the highest bidder.

A CRUEL SCHEME.

(Continued from page 79.)

The fire spread so rapidly that the sky was soon one lurid glow. One by one the three children were handed by their father to the firemen; but when Mrs. Norton's turn came the flames had so scorched and charred the ladder that it swayed with her weight, and snapping in the middle, she was thrown with great violence to the ground.

Noel Walden was on the spot by this time. He was one of those who ran to fetch the second ladder, and watered it copiously before prepping it up against the burning house, in the hope that it would hold out against the flames till Andrew Norton had made his perilous descent.

With straining eyes Vera watched her father's progress; but when he reached her side, scorched and grimy from the smoke, but yet uninjured, the revulsion was too great for her, and she fainted away.

There was no question now of another tenant for Whitehill Farm—it was only a mass of blackened ruins; and Noel Walden at once offered the hospitality of the Castle, not only to Mr. Norton and his children, but to the remains of the woman through whose interference Vera had suffered so much.

But Andrew declined. He seemed at this moment to forget the long years of estrangement between himself and the Brices following his second marriage, and preferred the Vicar's hospitality to that of his future son-in-law.

Poor Mrs. Norton was buried a few days later, but at the earnest desire, not only of Noel Walden, but of her father, Vera's marriage was not put off.

"Ill luck follows me everywhere," said poor Norton sadly; "I don't want it to fall on the child."

But Noel had a scheme to propose which would, he thought, result in there being still a Norton at Whitehill. He intended to live abroad for the first year of his married life. He must leave an agent in charge at Walden. If Vera's father would accept the post, and the pretty house which went with it, by the time Noel returned Whitehill would be rebuilt and ready for him. Between the insurance money and the half of Vera's portion which he eagerly desired to make over to her father, there would be plenty, not only to furnish the house and stock the farm, but to leave money in hand for all the expenses of the next two years.

"Believe me," said Noel, as he stood with Mr. Norton by the newly-made grave of his second wife, "the only reason for your leaving Walden is now removed. Had your wife lived, I would not have pressed it—I know it might have been painful for us all; but now, why should you leave your birthplace when you know, without you, Vera will never be quite happy?"

Some mysterious person placed a sum of money to Noel's credit sufficient to clear off the mortgages on Walden, so it was as a free man that he married Vera one bright April morning. For some time he believed the anonymous gift to have come from his mother; but later he suspected it to be a wedding gift from Ida Melville—a much nearer guess.

Noel and his bride remained abroad not one year, but two. When they came back to Walden a new Whitehill had risen on the ruin of the old. Mr. Norton, with Joan as housekeeper, and a good, motherly governess for the little girls, looked happier than he had done since the days of Vera's childhood.

Miss Melville made her home chiefly with Lady Lucy at the Dower House. It was partly owing to her persuasions that Noel's mother "came round" at last, and partly owing to an eagerness to see the heir of Walden, a very promising young gentleman who was born soon after his parents return to Walden Castle.

No one ever appeared to think Noel had made a *méchante*. His pretty wife was a favourite everywhere; and her father was often seen at

the Castle, having quite got over his aversion to society since his wife's death.

The three little girls were never happier than when playing with their small nephew; and no one has ever told them how cruelly Vera once suffered through their Mother's CRUEL SCHEME.

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

WHEN is a thief best understood? When he is apprehended!

IN most games of cards a good deal depends on a good deal.

IF a woman's face is her fortune, a man's cheek is frequently his.

SKAGGS: "Does your wife ever lose her temper?" Raggs: "Not that I ever knew of."

LOFTUS: "What sort of a dog is that you have—a pointer?" Spotty: "No; a disappointment."

THE proof of the pudding is in the state of your health on the morning after you have eaten it.

A GOOD man is a man who is good to us, and a bad man is a man who doesn't do what we want him to.

THE PROFESSOR: "What is happiness?" The Philosopher: "The condition of forgetting that you are unhappy."

QUERIST: "I wonder how it is that so few women stutter when they talk?" Wagster: "They haven't got time."

"MISS BUDD's heart is like a volume in a circulating library." "How is that?" "Not to be kept longer than two weeks."

"NAMED your boy John after yourself, Mr. Barrows?" "No, Mrs. Tomson. We have named him James after a prolonged family row."

WHEN a man's feet slip on the icy sidewalk the remarks he makes generally indicate that he also had a slip of the tongue.

HE: "As a rule, a man should not kiss a girl without first securing her permission." SHE: "There is no rule without an exception."

"DOCTOR," said the medical student, "is a blind man apt to be an idiot?" "Why, no. What makes you ask that?" "The adage says, 'out of sight, out of mind.'"

GREENIE: "How do you manage to make so much money on the races?" Sportie: "I go around and get tips." "Ah, I see." "Yes. And then bet on the other horse."

SHE: "Are you in the auction business?" HE: "No. Why do you ask?" SHE: "Because you hold my hand, and say you are going, going, but never go."

THE idea of employing pretty girls for bill-collectors looks feasible, but it would not work. The delinquent debtors would all want them to "call again."

SHE: "Charlie, why are you so very much opposed to piano duets?" HE: "From principle. I think it's cowardly for two persons to attack one piece of music."

YOUNG CALLOW: "Do you know there are certain lines that keep running through and through my head all the time?" Miss Cutting: "Well, what's to stop them?"

LITTLE GIRL: "I can't make it out why everyone wants to see your ma's baby. Babies is plentiful enough." "I expect it's because my ma's one is a new one, and they want to see the latest style in babies."

PLYMOUTH:—"Heavens! Have you heard that De Glacey's wife has eloped with Von Viskers?" "Oh dear, me, yes. I heard it first, and told him, and he remarked that he was not surprised, as he had been infatuated with her once himself."

THE skipper shouted to the man at the wheel: "Another pint a-port, quartermaster!" "How shocking!" cried a lady passenger. "That's the third pint of port he has called for within the last ten minutes. How these captains do drink!"

CLERGYMAN (examining a Sunday-school class): "Now, can any of you tell me what are the sins of omission?" Small Scholar: "Please, sir, they're sins you ought to have committed and haven't."

COUNTY CORK, Sunday morning.—Publican: "Well, as you say, it is a case between life and death, I'll risk it, and here's the whisky. What is the trouble?" "Sure, there is a wake on at O'Dudeen's."

A SERVICE CLUB: "I shall sue the paper for libel. It's infamous; it calls me a prig and a liar." His Friend: "I certainly would, Major; you are sure to get thumping damages. Greater the truth, greater the libel, you know."

MISS GIDDYON: "I don't see why they put second hands on watches." Mr. Spout (newly elected to the Legislature): "Why, my dear, no motion ever comes to anything without a second."

MRS. GASWELL: "It was so cold at Mrs. Van Braam's this afternoon that my teeth actually chattered." Mr. Gaswell (cruelly): "Gracious! Couldn't you do enough chattering with your tongue?"

"NOO YAWK is a great city," said Lord Needleby, "but youah watch front is very bad. Youah piers are disgracefully dirty." "No worse than your English peers, are they, Noedleby?" queried Smithers.

LITTLE BOY: "Teacher said the Emperor of China has ten men to carry his umbrella. What's that for?" Papa (thoughtfully): "I suppose it takes that many to remember to bring it along."

EDITOR: "Did you see the big fire, Mr. Quil-drive?" Quil-drive (a reporter): "I did, sir. The scene defied description." Editor: "Then please write a two-column description of it at once."

MERRITT: "I'm asked to take part in the amateur theatricals, and wish you would give me your advice." CORA: "I don't think I could suggest anything better than the old adage which advises one to think twice before he acts."

"You never sit and talk to me as you did before we were married," sighed the young wife. "No," replied the husband, who was a draper's assistant. "The gurn'r told me to stop praising the goods as soon as the bargain was struck."

SIMPLEX (after an evening of Longbow's stories at the club): "What a wonderful memory that fellow has!" Cynicus: "Yes; he remembers more things that never happened, and in more different ways, than anybody I ever knew before."

STRANGER: "Why don't you clear the rats out of your chicken-house?" Farmer Basic: "They don't do no harm." Stranger: "Don't they eat eggs?" Farmer Basic: "They used to, but not now. I think these new-fashioned china nest-eggs has sort o' discouraged 'em."

AUTHOR (after first-night performance): "If you have any suggestions to offer as to changes, I shall be glad to consider and act on them." Critic: "I think it would give better satisfaction to the audience if you were to eliminate the horrible poisoning scene in the last act, and insert it in the first."

"How do you manage to get rid of bores?" asked Snodgrass as he came in and took a seat by the editor's desk. "Oh, easily enough," replied the editor. "I begin to tell them stories about my smart youngster. Now, only the other day he said—What! must you go? Well, good morning."

"I HAD a funny experience last night," said young Spencer, as he sipped his coffee. "I was at a party at De Vere's, and there was an old major with a wooden leg who would persist in walking on the beautiful polished floor reserved for dancing. 'Haden't you better come on the rug?' said the host, a trifle nervous about the effect of his guest's leg upon the floor. 'You might slip out there you know.' 'Oh, don't be afraid, my boy,' said the major. 'There is no danger. I have a nail in the end of it.'"

SOCIETY.

THERE is a proposal to introduce a new head-dress for the Royal Artillery.

In Denmark it has been found by experience that woman reporters in Parliament succeed better than men.

THE fourth, and last, Drawing Room will take place on Friday, May 12th, and it is to be held for the Queen by Princess Christian.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales are once more to issue invitations for a great *omnium gathering* at Marlborough House on July.

THE Prince of Wales will entertain the members of the Jockey Club at dinner at Marlborough House on the evening of the Derby Day, Wednesday, May 31st.

PRINCE ALFRED is to be kept on the active list of the Prince of Wales's Volunteer Battalion Devonshire Regiment, though it is not probable that he will ever do duty with the corps.

THE christening of the Duchess of Fife's baby is not to take place until some time after the Duke of York's twenty-eighth birthday, on which date—Saturday, June 3—the Queen's birthday will be officially celebrated.

PRINCE GEORGE of Greece is well known over here—a fine, tall, frank-faced young fellow, who was never tired of laughing and joking with his young cousins, and who was a very great favourite with his aunt the Princess of Wales, for whose great sorrow he has since felt very deeply.

It is a fact not generally known, but maids of honour to the Queen, although their duties are wearisome and the salary a small one considering the inevitable cost in costumes, have one golden chance. If a maid of honour marries during her term of duty the monarch gives her the handsome little present of £1,000.

MEN who have seats in the Great Hall for the opening of the Imperial Institute are to wear uniform or civilian Court dress so that the effect will be good. The Gentlemen-at-Arms will be on duty and the Yeomen of the Guard drawn up in the vestibule, while the Native Indian and Colonial soldiers brought over for the purpose will in themselves be a picturesque and imposing sight to Londoners.

It is said that a large proportion of the plumes worn by ladies who attend the Queen's Drawing-Room are hired from the shop, which makes a business of renting out plumes. The feathers are worth £1 to £3, and the rent of them is five or six shillings for each occasion.

THE Empress Frederick and Princess Beatrice have strongly urged upon their mother the desirability of Her Majesty's emerging somewhat from her retirement, especially as she will have Royal visitors to entertain. It has already been arranged that the Queen will visit Aldershot to review the troops, and it is on the tapis that a garden party will be given at Buckingham Palace in honour of the King and Queen of Italy.

EXTENSIVE alterations and improvements are being carried out at New Mar Lodge, the Duke of Fife's place in Aberdeenshire, and a new wing, consisting entirely of bedrooms and dressing-rooms, is being added to the building. The Duke and Duchess are to arrive at Braemar at the end of July for a stay of three months, and it is understood that the Prince and Princess of Wales and their family will be guests at New Mar Lodge for several weeks during the shooting-season.

THE Queen is to drive in a full-dress carriage, drawn by four cream-coloured ponies, from Buckingham Palace to the Imperial Institute, by way of Constitution Hill, Hyde Park, and Queen's Gate. There will be a cavalry escort, and a portion of the route is to be lined with soldiers, blue-jackets, and marines. All the members of the Royal Family who are then in England will be present at the ceremony, and afterwards the Queen is to have a luncheon party at Buckingham Palace.

STATISTICS.

A MILLION matches are used in Europe every twelve minutes.

THE Metropolis maintains one cabdriver to every 1,880 of its inhabitants.

THERE are now 27 royal families in Europe which have about 400 members. Of these 27 families 18 are German.

AT the beginning of 1893 there were 1,701,000,000 francs in gold and 1,257,000,000 francs in silver in the vaults of the Bank of France. It would require 688 cars of a capacity of 10 tons each to move the metals.

GEMS.

BEAUTY to women is like the flower in spring; but virtue is like the stars of heaven.

TRUTH is eclipsed often, and it sets for a night; but never is it turned aside from its eternal path.

LAZINESS, carelessness, and filthiness are a trio which have brought destruction and ruin to many men.

THREE things are known only in the following way—a hero in war, a friend in necessity, and a wise man in anger.

CHERISH your heart's best affections. Indulge in the warm emotions of filial, parental, fraternal love. Think it not a weakness. Love everything and everybody that is lovely. You cannot make the cords of love too strong.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

If apples are cored before they are pared there is less danger of their breaking.

BAKED BANANAS.—To bake bananas, strip a narrow piece lengthwise from one edge of the banana, and bake one half-hour in a moderate oven. As soon as they are taken from the oven, pour a very little lemon juice over them, sprinkle with powdered sugar, and serve.

BROWN BREAD.—Dissolve 2 oz. of butter in half a pint of boiling water; into this stir 1 lb. of wheat meal. Knead this to a firm dough; mix and beat it well, roll it out to a thickness of half an inch; prick the biscuits when cut; and bake in a quick oven.—BREAKFAST.—Mix 1 lb. of flour with a quarter of a pint of thick cream (or quantities proportionate to the above); add salt to taste. Roll it out, cut into biscuits, bake in a hot oven fifteen to twenty minutes.

CURRENT DUMPLING.—6 oz. of flour, 1 tablespoon sugar, 2 oz. of suet, 1 lb. currants, 1 teaspoon soda, 1 teaspoon tartaric acid, 1 teaspoon spice, 1 breakfast cup milk; chop the suet and mix all the dry things together, pour in the milk and mix well; dip a soft cloth in boiling water and sprinkle a little flour over a part of it, put the mixture in this, tie it up, not quite tightly, and very neatly, and put in boiling water to boil one hour; take out and pour the following sauce over it.—Sauce.—1 teaspoon butter, 1 dessertspoon flour, 1 breakfast cup of milk and water, 1 tablespoon sugar, a little nutmeg; mix smoothly, and stir over the fire till it boils a few minutes.

LEMON MARMALADE.—4 lbs lemons, 8 breakfast cups water. Wipe the lemons with a soft cloth, and pare the skin very thinly from them; cut into very thin chips; put those in an enamelled pan, with two breakfast cups of the water, to boil for half an hour. Meanwhile, remove all the white part of the skin of the lemon, and put it aside. Cut up all the pulp, and put it in a jelly pan with the remainder of the water to boil for one hour. Then pour it into a jelly bag and let it drip. Measure the juice, and to each large breakfast cup of it put 1 lb. of sugar. Also add the skins and the liquid they were boiled in. Let it all boil about half an hour, or till it gets thick, and put in pots.

MISCELLANEOUS.

GLASS beads were mediums of exchange in the earliest ages.

CANES are sold in America which will hold about three ounces of liquid, and in the silver handle of which is concealed a cup.

THE smallest book in the world is only half the size of a postage stamp. It is in the possession of the Earl of Dufferin, and is an edition of the sacred book of the Sikhs.

ROBERT WELSH was the first man to get a medal for bravery in battle. Charles I. in 1643 ordered a gold medal to be struck for him for recovering the colours at Edgehill.

WHERE the native Sikh Government used to exact from the peasant as rent six shillings' worth of produce out of twelve, the British take only two or even one.

In China a man cannot by will dispose of his land in favour of any one person, whether relative or stranger; it must be distributed among all his male children without exception.

THE Postmaster-General of Norway has ordered that after January 1, 1893, the bicycle shall be used by all country postmen for the delivery of mails where the road will permit.

BOTH Hindoo and Mussulman women wear glass bangles, and in the north-west provinces they are regarded as sacred objects. If a glass bangle be accidentally broken, its pieces must be gathered together and kissed three times.

THE smallest animal in the world that suckles its young is the Etruscan shrew, which measures 2½ in., inclusive of the tail. This is only half the length of the smallest English mammal—the harvest mouse.

THE latest development of the "coin-in-the-slot" device is an automatic railway ticket-reeling machine. It has for some little time been in use on the Berlin City and District Railway, and is said to give satisfaction to the public as well as to the railway company.

THE enormous increase of locusts in Algeria, is attributed to the wholesale shooting of ostriches, partridges, quails, &c. It is calculated that one quail devours from 20,000 to 25,000 locusts during the few weeks these insects are small enough for it to swallow them.

A STRANGE custom is followed by Mexican farmers. They use oxen of one colour in the morning, and another colour in the afternoon. They do not know why, but they know that it must be the right thing to do because their forefathers did it.

FOR people who use candles an ingenious man has invented an automatic snuffer. The device is fixed to the base of the candle, which, when it burns to a certain point, releases a heavy ball and chain. This throws a snuffing cap immediately over the flame.

THE best anchovies come from the Mediterranean, and the Gorgona are the most highly esteemed. It has, however, been recently discovered that the anchovy is a denizen of British waters, and is to be found always on certain portions of our coast toward the end of summer.

ALL the motions and sensations of the various parts of the body are represented in the surface of the brain as on a map. Thus, there is a separate brain area necessary for sight, another for hearing, another for the motions of the fingers, and so on.

EVERY vessel that floats has, as a part of her company, a family of rats. They travel the world over on both steam and sailing-craft, but seldom make more than one voyage on the oil-carriers, as the cargo causes among them a distemper which not only injures the lungs of the rats but also changes the colour of their hair.

THERE are quite a number of women in New York who earn their living by taking in "baby boarders." These little tenants are anything but a burthen to their foster-parents, many of whom are widows or old maids who have passed the frivolous age and get a great deal of comfort out of a baby guest.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LA BELLE.—Full dress is indispensable.

LITTLE TIN SOLDIER.—The medieval lance was 18 feet long.

S. S. S.—There are fifty-three Sundays in the present year.

FINAR TOOK.—As soon as the son can work for his own maintenance.

LITTLE JOHN.—We do not understand what you mean by your question.

WORRIED FLO.—Inquiries might be made at any large hospital near at hand.

M. C.—Medical men are not exempt from duty on carriages or men-servants.

LINA FERRIS.—Tell him he is not to come near you again; his presence is an insult.

REGULAR READER.—Light rights are acquired after twenty years' uninterrupted enjoyment.

MARION.—You must get personal directions. You could not make such an article from a recipe.

MAID-OF-ALL-WORK.—Borax, if dissolved in the water used in washing the hands, will remove grime.

BERTIE.—Lord Chelmsford, and afterwards Lord Wolseley, were the generals in the Zulu War.

CURIOSITY.—Church bells are tuned by chipping the edge till the proper note is obtained.

POLLY FLINDERS.—An "at home" and a reception differ in the latter being the more formal occasion.

STELLA.—Try washing them regularly with carbolic soap, or rub them frequently with sweet oil.

I. J.—No Parliament this century has sat for seven years.

IGNORANT.—It is considered "bad form" to "talk shop" at the dinner-table.

A FRIEND.—There must be adultery and cruelty or desertion in order to enable the wife to obtain a divorce.

ARMY.—You have no remedy against the boy's father for the damage to your plate-glass windows.

CONSTANT READER.—A bill that does not pass all its readings in one Parliament is dropped, and must be brought in anew in the succeeding Parliament.

SWEET BRIAR.—The most expensive fur is that of the black fox of Kamtohatka, the skin of which, when dressed, becomes a very attractive blue.

EDMUND.—You can write to the Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W., who have now opened a U. S. Department.

DRESSMAKER.—King Henry I. had an arm 36 inches long. This is why the English yard is its present length.

TEACHER.—There are about half a million children attending the 400 schools under the London School Board.

WORRIED MOTHER.—The character of food should vary with the season of the year, more meat being required in winter than in spring and summer.

MATRIMONY.—The fee to the clergyman for performing the marriage service does not include the regular charge of 2s. 7d. for a certificate.

H. A. T.—The witness's fee is regulated by his rank in life; you would be entitled, we should say, to at least 5s. per day and your expenses.

A LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—Unless a will be attested by two witnesses it is absolutely invalid, and of no effect. It does not require to be stamped.

TONY.—The collector of the post will inform you on the subject of paying duty, the amount, &c. The address requested is not known to us.

IN GREAT TROUBLE.—There are several homes for Inebriates. Address Hon. Secretary, Homes for Inebriates' Association, 42, Grove-road, Regent's Park, London.

H. W.—He will be unable to obtain payment of the money from the bank until he takes out letters of administration to his wife's estate.

MOLLIE.—Glass stoppers may be loosened by application of a few drops of ammonia, or putting a cloth wet in hot water about the neck of the bottle.

MOUSEY.—Your handwriting is quite fair and legible, but without any particular indication of character, except, perhaps, in the way of painstaking.

UNCERTAINTY.—If you think you are heir-at-law, put the case in the hands of a solicitor, who, if he believes you have a claim, will carry it through for you.

DICK'S PET.—There is nothing distinctively new in hosiery. Plain silk stockings to match the dress, and dainty satin slippers, are generally used with evening dresses.

H. M. L.—In an ordinary case a five-pound note would cover all expenses, but as we have an idea of the work to be done in this instance, and you do not tell us, we are unable to say what expense will be incurred in winding up the estate.

P. M.—The parents can take proceedings to recover money spent for maintenance; or the man may be prosecuted for wrongfully converting property belonging to his wife while they are living apart. As to the mode of other proceeding, you must ask a lawyer.

A NEW SERIAL STORY

BY A WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR OF CONSIDERABLE REPUTE, ENTITLED

FOR EVER AND A DAY,

WILL BE COMMENCED IN No. 1568, PUBLISHED ON MAY 9TH, 1893.

Y. Z.—We think you will find that there is no real "demand" for emigrants at present, but steady trade and fair inducements for all; you will have to go to Massachusetts.

SCHOOLBOY.—Newfoundland was discovered by John Cabot in 1497. Gasper Cortoreal discovered Conception Bay and Portugal Cove and established the first fisheries.

LOUT.—Officers in the army and militia have to provide their own outfit; militia officers receive their commissions on the recommendation of the Lord-Lieutenant.

BROKEN-HEARTED.—The young woman is in honour bound to return the engagement ring when she breaks off the engagement; if she does not, the young man can sue her for the value of it.

CHILDREN OF THE STREET.

I see the children of the street
With pinched and pallid faces,
And saddened eyes that never greet
Earth's green and pleasant places.

How different their lives from those
That pass where mountains tower,
Or where in grassy vales the rose
Climbs o'er the garden bower.

How different from theirs who dwell
On shores where winds and waters
Are cradle song and dying knell
Of sailor's sons and daughters.

Cramped in their homes as in a cage,
They live like human cattle,
With poverty and death they wage
A never-ending battle.

Those whom death spares in youth grow up
In days of sin and sorrow;
They drink the present's bitter cup
And think not of the morrow.

Religion claims a few, but few
Indeed yield to her pleading;
The others go on blindly through
The way where sin is leading.

Ah, happy they whose young feet trod
The paths of fields and mountains,
Who love for man and faith in God
Drank in at nature's fountains.

J. M. H.

S. W.—If you mean the Regimental Ordnance Store Department, you can apply for particulars to the Commissary-General, Matthew J. Tierney Ingram, Woolwich Arsenal.

INQUIRER.—The first newspaper in the modern sense was issued monthly at Venice in 1536; the first English newspaper was published in 1632; the first American in 1704.

HELEN HERNCastle.—Sprinkle bran over the velvet, and well brush it out. To raise the pile, hold the wrong or smooth side over the steam of boiling water, again brush, and you will find it as good almost as new.

A LOVER OF CATS.—The fur of your Persian cat ought not to become clotted if the animal were in good health. Try mixing a little sulphur with the milk which you give it, and lessen the quantity of meat for a time.

LORD DUNCHESTER.—The star of India is represented by five points and surrounded by a circle representing light. The ribbon is light blue, with white stripes towards the edge. The motto is "Heaven's Light Our Guide."

HOPKINS.—A physician claims to have cured twelve cases of consumption by placing the patients for two or three hours every day in a compartment filled with compressed air containing the vapours of creosote mixed with eucalyptus.

BIRDIE.—The song you speak of is unknown to us. We are not able to make out any special meaning in the words you quote. All popular songs derive their interest from their pathos and sentiment and from rhythm and melody rather than from any special significance of the words.

JIMMY.—The Arabian camel is sometimes erroneously called the dromedary, but the dromedary is only a variety of it, and differs from it only in the same way that the race-horse differs from the common horse. The dromedary will carry a rider more than 100 miles in a day; but the camel rarely travels faster than about two and a half miles an hour.

DAK.—The son had no right in the property except such as might be given to him under his father's will; as he died before that right could be said to vest in him it cannot pass to his widow, but will devolve upon his sisters equally.

X. Y. Z.—If the person is only now beginning to have an income, his present year's salary is regarded as his average by the Inland Revenue authorities, and he will be taxed upon the full amount of it; that is the rule acted upon.

BAITANNA.—Of Britain nothing is known historically before the invasion of Caesar, except by a few obscure allusions. It is conjectured to have been originally peopled first by the Celts from Gaul, and afterward by Teutonic tribes from Germany and Scandinavia.

ONE IN DEBT.—Seeing you have acknowledged the debt in writing by saying you would pay it, you cannot now plead prescription, except when you do so and your letter is produced you immediately explain that what you meant there was that you would pay the amount you owed.

JUSTINA.—Tortoise-shell is softened by putting it into boiling water. It may then be moulded or pressed into shape, which it will keep after cooling. Pieces may also be welded or joined together by scraping the edges down thin, warming them, and then pressing them tightly together in a screw press.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—There is no such thing as a "free divorce"; but on the certificate of a barrister that the case is one in which, through the poverty of the applicant, the Court fees should be remitted, the Court will remit the fees. The other expenses must be paid by the petitioner.

TRAVELLER.—London has 659 railway stations, specially adapted for passenger traffic, 400 of which are within the twelve mile radius of St. Paul's, and 256 within the six mile radius. These embrace in all some 750 miles of line, over which upwards of one million passengers travel daily.

DISFIGURED.—The homely cure is to wash the face with buttermilk before going to bed at night, and to let it dry and to wash off in the morning; a more elaborate mixture is a half-dram of muriate of ammonia, two drachms of lavender water, and a half-pint of distilled water (all these from a chemist), then mix and apply to the face four times daily.

COOKIE.—Pass a pint of the juice of bruised apricots through a jelly-bag till quite clear. Make it into a syrup with half-a-pound of refined sugar. Add an ounce of tartaric acid, bottle and cork tightly. Mix two tablespoonfuls of this syrup, and a scruple of bicarbonate of soda, to a glass of water, and drink while effervescing.

CARPENTER.—Ordinary carpenters can command from 11s. to 12s. a day. A second-class passage costs about 437 6s. Children under 16 pay one-sixteenth of the above rate for every year of age entered upon. Before sailing you should send a penny stamp and your address to the chief clerk, Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, Westminster, S.W., for "The Natal Handbook."

A BASHFUL MAIDEN.—The next Leap Year after 1896 will not be 1900, but 1904. The astronomers fixed the solar year at 365 days six hours, comprising, as they thought, the period from one vernal equinox to another. The six hours were set aside, and in four years they formed a day. The fourth year was made to contain 366 days, the extra day being added to February, making 29 days in the month. This arrangement made the year nearly three minutes longer than the astronomical year. To obviate this, 1700 and 1800 were not Leap Years, and 1900 will not be a Leap Year, but 2,000 will be one.

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††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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